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LIFE

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OF

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN

BY

LLOYD C. SANDERS.

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NEW YORK: 3 EAST 14TH STREET,
AND MELBOURNE.

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LIFE OF SHERIDAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE Anglo-Irish family of Sheridan possessed in a marked degree the dominant characteristics of their race—ability, buoyancy, and thriftlessness. Among Swift's Irish friends none is so interesting as Dr. Thomas Sheridan, the dramatist's grandfather. He was an accomplished scholar, and a good schoolmaster; excellent company—Lord Orrery describes him as a punster, a quibbler, a fiddler, and a wit—but hopelessly improvident and hopelessly devoid of tact, though assuredly not of tenderness. He was one of the few men whom Swift seems to have really esteemed, though the Dean's calculating friendship but poorly returned the wealth of affection bestowed on him by the open-hearted Irishman. In justice to Swift, however, it should be pointed out that Dr. Sheridan was one of those persons for whom it is well-nigh impossible to obtain anything. He was appointed one of the chaplains to the Lord Lieutenant, but was promptly struck off the list for a very adequate reason. It fell to his lot to preach at Cork on the king's birthday, and what must he do but select the text, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"? "Too much advertency is not your talent," wrote Swift to him in mild rebuke, "or else you had fled from that text as from a rock. For as Don Quixote said to Sancho, 'What business had you to speak of a halter in a family where one of it was hanged?'" Sheridan bought a school at Cavan in 1735, whence he conducted a rollicking correspondence with Swift. But two years afterwards he sold the school for £400, and, as his friend briefly records, "spent the money, grew into disease, and died." George IV., on reading his correspondence with Swift, remarked to Croker how exactly his character corresponded with that of his brilliant grandson, and the parallel is tolerably obvious.

Dr. Sheridan's third son Thomas is a sufficiently familiar figure in the pages of Boswell, and may perhaps be briefly described as an ineffectual genius, whose great talents were spoilt by diffuseness and pedantry. At first an actor, he became a popular favourite at Dublin, and though hardly, as has been asserted, a rival of Garrick, trod the London boards with considerable credit, notably in the parts of Brutus and King John. As the manager of a Dublin theatre he did not win success, and became the victim of various theatrical conspiracies, but was fortunate enough to secure the anonymous advocacy, and win the hand, of the accomplished young authoress, Frances Chamberlaine. She was of good family, the granddaughter of an English baronet, and her father was a dignitary of the Irish Church. They were married in 1747, and their second son, Richard Brinsley Butler, was born at No. 12, Dorset Street, Dublin, on the 30th of October, 1751.[1]

The parents seem to have divided their time, with the exception of a professional visit to London, between the Irish capital and the meagre family estate at Quilca, until 1758, when they finally removed to England. Richard and his sister Alicia remained behind, and went first as day-scholars, and then as boarders, to Mr. Whyte's, of Grafton Street, Dublin, who afterwards taught Moore, Sheridan's biographer. About eighteen months later they followed their parents across the Channel, and found the house in Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, the centre of a literary society, of which Samuel Richardson and Dr. Johnson were the most celebrated members. Mrs. Sheridan meanwhile was trying to keep the wolf from the door by writing her novel, "The Adventures of Miss Sidney Biddulph," a very remarkable specimen of the Richardsonian school of fiction, which won the cordial approbation of Lord North and Mr. Fox, while Dr. Johnson said of it that he knew not if she had a right, on moral principles, to make her characters suffer so much. A comedy entitled "The Discovery" followed, which was promptly accepted by Garrick, and which contained in Sir Anthony Branville one of his favourite parts. "The Dupe" however failed, owing to the indelicacy of some of its situations, or according to another story, through the cabals of the famous actress, Mrs. Clive.

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[1] This is the date given by Mr. Chester in his notes to the "Registers in Westminster Abbey." Sheridan's biographers say vaguely that he was born in September.

The father was employed in acting, and in lecturing on British education. His scheme was about equally compounded of common sense and whim; he saw the value of professional training in youth, but he vastly over-estimated the worth of oratory as a medium for bringing up the young idea. He was also compiling a "Pronouncing Dictionary of the English Language," and received as an encouragement to his undertaking a pension of £200 a year. "What?" said Johnson, "have they given *him* a pension? Then it is time for me to give up mine." A quarrel naturally ensued, which was never completely healed, though the Doctor made more than one overture. The original cause of offence was the more uncalled for, because it was owing to Sheridan's influence with Wedderburne, to whom he had given lessons in English pronunciation, that Dr. Johnson owed his own pension. Nor is it fair to take seriously his scathing speech. "Why, sir, Sherry is dull, naturally dull, but it must have taken him a deal of pains to become what he is. Such an excess of stupidity is not in nature. . . . Besides, Sir, what influence can Mr. Sheridan have upon the language of this great country through his narrow exertions. It is burning a farthing candle at Dover, to show light at Calais." Lexicographers apparently do not always agree.

Affluence and the Sheridans dwelt far apart, and in 1764, the father, mother, and two daughters, influenced partly by pecuniary considerations, partly by the state of Mrs. Sheridan's health, retired to Blois. The admirable woman—Dr. Parr termed her "quite celestial"—had only time to write an Oriental tale "Nourjahad," and the second part of "Sidney Biddulph," when she died in August, 1766. Thus her son Dick never saw her again, for he had gone to Harrow in 1762, where he was placed under the care of his father's acquaintance, Dr. Sumner. His schooldays do not call for any especial comment. Both masters and boys liked him, and though he was apparently idle, and Dr. Parr in vain attempted to extract from him some signs of that superior intelligence which he was known to possess, yet it is probable that he managed to pick up a fair amount of scholarship. Indeed he had already entered into a literary partnership with a schoolfellow called Halhed, and the pair translated the Seventh Idyl and many of the lesser poems of Theocritus, a performance which in itself is sufficient to prove that Dr. Parr's knowledge of his pupil was superficial. We gather, too, that the future orator was chosen to recite a Greek speech, which his budding extravagance suggested to him would be most appropriately delivered in the uniform of a British general officer. He had also developed the taste for practical jokes which distinguished him through life; his myrmidons robbed apple-orchards for him, and the thefts could never be traced to their instigator.

Sheridan left Harrow in his seventeenth year, and lived with his father and elder brother Charles in Frith Street, Soho. Want of means alone would probably have prevented his being sent to the University, but it does not follow, as is sometimes asserted, that old Sheridan was careless of his son's future. He was at this time maturing his educational scheme, and in 1769 it was published with a letter to the king, in which the author offered to devote his life to the cause, on the receipt of a sufficient pension to enable him to abandon the theatre. Visions of an academy in which he would be the guiding spirit, and his sons the executive, floated before the gaze of this sanguine Irishman, and with that view he instructed them daily in elocution. At the same time they received lessons in Latin and mathematics from a Mr. Ker, while the remainder of a polite education was acquired at Angelo's riding-school. The royal ear, however, was invoked in vain, and old Sheridan, nothing daunted, retired in 1771—not 1770, as stated by Moore in his "Life of Sheridan"—to Bath, where he worked away at his dictionary, which ultimately appeared in 1780. "What, Sir," asked Dr. Johnson, "entitled Sheridan to fix the pronunciation of English?"

Meantime the literary association with Halhed had been resumed, young Sheridan being perhaps doubtful of the ultimate success of his father's schemes, and anxious to make a living by his pen. Their first essay was a farce called "Jupiter," which contains some clever dialogue, but is chiefly remarkable for being thrown into the form of a rehearsal, and thus an anticipation of "The Critic." Another attempt, for which Sheridan alone was responsible, was a dramatic sketch founded on the "Vicar of Wakefield." A periodical paper entitled *Herman's Miscellany* was then projected, but never proceeded beyond the first number, written by Sheridan, while a "Collection of Occasional Poems," and a volume of "Crazy Tales," seem to have perished in embryo. In fact, the only production which saw the light was a verse translation of the Epistles of an obscure Greek author named Aristænetus, which was published in August, 1771. The MS. was due in March, but owing to Sheridan's laziness, and possibly owing to his limited knowledge of Greek—though he conscientiously supplemented his deficiencies by the aid of a grammar—it does not appear to have reached the publisher Wilkie until May. Taken as a whole the performance was by no means discreditable—in fact, Sheridan had little cause to be ashamed of any of his early efforts—but it was far from proving a pecuniary success. A report that the volume was making a stir in London, and had been attributed to Dr. Johnson, was followed by its comparative failure. It succeeded somehow or other in struggling into a second edition, but the collaborators were wise enough not to venture on a second instalment.

Though the data are few, it is probable that young Sheridan had little difficulty in making his way in the easy society of the queen of watering-places. The place must have been, however, an unwholesome home for so precocious a boy, and to his vagrant youth, combined with the early death of his mother, must be attributed much of that absence of self-restraint which operated so disastrously upon his manhood and old age. His figure was tall and graceful; of his face Byron wrote that, even in his decline, "the upper part was that of a god—a forehead most expansive, an eye of peculiar brilliancy and fire"; he shone in conversation, and could turn out a very pretty copy of verses on the spur of the moment. The last quality must have made him popular among the frequenters of Lady Miller's house at Bath Easton, where according to Horace Walpole, "all the flux of quality contended for prizes gained for rhymes and themes; a Roman vase, dressed with pink ribbons and myrtle, received the poetry which was drawn out at each festival"; the victor knelt and kissed the hand of Lady Miller, who crowned him with a wreath. A more captivating person, Lady Margaret Fordyce, sister of Lady Anne Lindsay, the writer of "Auld Robin Grey," was celebrated by him in the well-known passage:—

> . . : "Mark'd you her cheek of rosy hue?
> Mark'd you her eye of sparkling blue?
> That eye, in liquid circles moving;
> That cheek abashed at Man's approving;
> The *one* Love's arrows darting round;
> The *other* blushing at the wound:
> Did she not speak, did she not move,
> Now *Pallas*—now the Queen of Love!

The lines occur in a poem called "Clio's Protest; or the Picture Varnished," an answer to some verses descriptive of the beauties of Bath by General Fitzpatrick, subsequently one of Sheridan's intimates, which were entitled "The Bath Picture." "Clio's Protest" also contained the familiar couplet—

> "You write with ease to show your breeding,
> But *easy writing's* vile *hard* reading."

In another effusion, styled "A Panegyric to the Ridotto," given when the new Assembly Rooms were opened on the 30th of September, 1771, he satirized the tradespeople of Bath, and their undignified rush towards the supper-room. Timothy Screw, a waiter, is supposed to un-

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burden his mind at their expense to his brother Henry, a waiter at aristocratic Almack's.

> "But here I must mention the best thing of all,
> And what I'm informed ever marks a *Bath* ball,
> The variety 'tis which so reign'd in the crew,
> That turn where one would the classes were new:
> For here no dull level of rank and degrees,
> No uniform mode, that shows all are at ease;
> But like a chess table, part black and part white,
> 'Twas a delicate chequer of *low* and *polite*.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Not less among you was the medley, ye fair;
> I believe there *were* some besides Quality there:
> Miss Spiggot, Miss Brussels, Miss Tape, and Miss Socket,
> Miss Trinket, and aunt, with her leathern pocket;
> With good Mrs. Soaker, who made her old chin go
> For hours, hobnobbing with Mrs. Syringo."

Among those who frequented Bath for professional purposes were Mr. Linley, the composer, and his family, "a nest of nightingales." The eldest daughter was known as the Maid of Bath, and her beauty and exquisite voice had already gathered round her a numerous band of admirers, some of whom she was compelled, from her position as a public singer, to treat with more ceremony than they deserved. She was barely seventeen, but had already had several offers of marriage, amongst others from an elderly and wealthy gentleman of Wiltshire named Long. Her parents naturally wished for the marriage, but she told Mr. Long that she could never be happy with him, and the good old man took upon himself the responsibility of breaking off the alliance, and even indemnified Mr. Linley, who was proceeding to bring the matter into court, by settling £3,000 upon his daughter. Among those who entertained honourable designs were Halhed and Charles Sheridan; of her unworthy lovers the most pertinacious was Mr. Mathews, a married man of fortune. It appears that the elders of the Sheridan and Linley families had already become acquainted, through Mrs. Sheridan having taken some singing lessons from Mr. Linley in 1764; and when the fathers met again at Bath, a close friendship was formed between their daughters, which the Sheridan boys naturally turned to their own account. Of the exact course of events it would be difficult, even if it were worth while, to give the history, since the long letter, purporting to be by Miss Linley, and written in Lydia Languish's best manner, upon which biographers commonly rely, has been denounced by Sheridan's granddaughter Mrs. Norton, as a clumsy forgery.[1] But it is clear that Richard Sheridan easily disposed of the claims of Halhed, absent at Oxford, and of the solemn Charles. His muse ably seconded his efforts by the pretty verses beginning—

> "Dry be that tear, my gentlest love,
> Be hush'd that struggling sigh."

Halhed retired to India, Charles to a farmhouse near Bath, whence he wrote to Miss Linley a letter of farewell.

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[1] A collection of letters, purporting to have been written by Miss Linley after her marriage with Sheridan, was published in *The English Illustrated Magazine* in 1884. As their authenticity appears to be decidedly doubtful, it is possible that they were concocted by the same hand that wrote the letter alluded to in the text.

Mathews alone held the field against Sheridan, and the romantic imagination of the latter suggested an elopement as the best means of furthering his own ends, and foiling those of his rival. With his sister's connivance the lovers fled to London, thence to Dunkirk, with money borrowed from a friend of the family upon the representation that Miss Linley was a rich heiress, with whom Sheridan was eloping. A secret marriage of a somewhat perfunctory nature was accomplished at Calais, and they proceeded to Lisle, where Miss Linley, as she must still be called, retired into a convent, until the arrival of her father who, tolerant, practical man, brought her back to England to fulfil her engagements.

The second act of the comedy begins with a violent libel upon Sheridan by Mathews in *The Bath Chronicle*, and then indeed the gossips of Bath had good cause to swear with Bob Acres by "Odds hilts and blades, odds flints, pans and triggers." There were two so-called duels—the first a scuffle in a London tavern, after which Mathews was compelled to apologize; the second a scuffle near Bath, in which Sheridan was wounded. If Sheridan's own account may be accepted, Mathews showed great cowardice in the first duel, but had much the better of the second, though Sheridan, who was wounded while the pair were rolling together on the ground, declined to beg his life. The young man's wrath seems, in fact, to have got the better of his science, and blood and ink were spilt in about equal quantities. In the last scene Miss Linley rushes on with the passionate exclamation, "My husband, my husband!" and the curtain falls upon a very effective situation.

In the third act, however, the interest begins to flag. Sheridan retired to Farm Hill near Waltham Abbey, and the paper warfare continued, a third duel being at one time in prospect. It was quite characteristic of him that he should have requested Woodfall to reprint in *The Morning Advertiser* a calumnious account of his conduct which had appeared in one of the Bath papers, so as to give him an opportunity of contradicting it, and then, from indolence, have omitted to send the counterblast. Meantime, old Sheridan would not hear of the marriage, and all communications were intercepted, while the appearance of Miss Linley in the oratorios at Covent Garden caused a fresh swarm of admirers to gather round her, and inflicted upon her husband *de jure*, if not *de facto*, those torments of groundless jealousy which, according to a not very tenable theory, he afterwards described in the character of Faulkland. Moore informs us that his nimble wit contrived many stratagems for the purpose of exchanging a few words with her, and that he more than once disguised himself as a hackney coachman, and drove her home from the theatre. Mr. Linley in the end proved less obdurate than Sheridan's father, and, the first ceremony being regarded as too informal, the lovers were married by license on April 13, 1773. The summer and autumn were spent in a cottage at East Burnham, and it was during a temporary absence that Sheridan wrote the lines which, in their perfected form, were one of the most popular songs in "The Duenna":—

> "What bard, O Time, discover,
> With wings first made thee move?

Ah! sure it was some lover
Who ne'er had left his love!
For who that once did prove
The pangs that absence brings,
Though but one day
He were away,
Could picture thee with wings!"

CHAPTER II.

EARLY in 1774 Sheridan and his wife proceeded to set up house in Orchard Street, Portman Square. No assistance was forthcoming from old Sheridan, who still harboured resentment against his son; but Mr. Linley supplied the furniture, and for ready money they had Mr. Long's three thousand pounds. The sum must have seemed an El Dorado to them, and they probably had little scruple about living on capital. An obvious source of income was Mrs. Sheridan's voice, but Sheridan at once rejected all thoughts of allowing her to perform in public, even though Lord North, the Chancellor of Oxford University, was reported as having said that her appearance there would be regarded as the highest compliment. Dr. Johnson warmly approved Sheridan's determination not to live upon his wife, and there can be no doubt that a manly sense of independence, not a weak compliance with social prejudices, was his actuating motive. It is probable, however, that the young couple at first intended to derive an income from a series of private entertainments, given in conjunction with the Linleys. At least there in a remarkably business-like tone in the following advertisement, which appeared in *The Morning Post* of February 4, 1774:—

> "Sheridan has taken a house in Orchard Street, Oxford Street, where he proposes, if his wife recovers, to give concerts twice a week to the nobility. Mrs. Sheridan has refused 1,200 guineas for twelve months at the Pantheon, 1,000 guineas for the Oratorios, and 1,000 for Gardiner's concert."

But the idea, a distinctly sensible one, seems to have been dropped. For we are assured by Sheridan's niece, Miss Lefanu, in her "Memoirs of Mrs. Frances Sheridan," that the concerts were given gratuitously, as a return for hospitalities received. The story is that the Sheridans took society by storm, sending out invitations and giving entertainments on equal terms to persons of distinction; and that when Sheridan was scolded for living beyond his means, he replied, "My dear Sir, these *are* my means." Like most Sheridaniana, the anecdote probably contains more fable than fact; indeed, there is distinct evidence that the gifted pair found the ascent to Olympus by no means unencumbered by obstacles. Moore records that there was some hesitation before Devonshire House opened its doors to them, and so late as 1785 we find Mr. Windham recording in his diary that he had spent the morning with Mrs. Legge, and that their chief topic of conversation was the reasons for and against being acquainted with Mrs. Sheridan. In this instance it is not uncharitable to surmise that the lady was for the prosecution, the gentleman for the defence, and it is to be hoped that the former was effectually reduced to silence. But the entry conclusively proves that the Sheridans, like most ambitious people of similar antecedents, were at first rather in society than of it, and had to endure a considerable period of probation below the salt before they were finally promoted to a footing of equality.

Meanwhile Sheridan was looking about for a livelihood. He had been entered a student of the Middle Temple, but for a person in his situation it would have been an obvious absurdity to devote himself to a profession the income from which was certain to be remote, and might possibly never come at all. Literature afforded brighter prospects, and in November, 1774, he wrote to Mr. Linley that he was very seriously at work on a book, which he was sending to the press. Whatever the work in question may have been, it never emerged from the printer's hands. Moore is inclined to identify it with an "Essay on the Letters of Lord Chesterfield," of which he found a part of the rough copy among Sheridan's papers, and as those famous Letters had only recently appeared the subject was undoubtedly tempting. Of the fragments given by Moore, one is interesting as admitting us to the secret of Sheridan's habits of intellectual labour:—

> "His [Lord Chesterfield's] directions for constant employment entirely ill-founded—a wise man is formed more by the action of his own thoughts than by continually feeding it. 'Hurry,' he says, 'from play to study; never be doing nothing.' I say, 'Frequently be unemployed; sit and think.' There are on every subject but a few leading and fixed ideas; their tracks may be traced by your own genius as well as by reading."

But essays and pamphlets were certainly not the main objects of his literary ambition. A successful drama is far more lucrative than a successful book, and Sheridan had an hereditary connection with the stage. His father was a well-known actor and manager, his mother had been the author of a highly successful play. He had, therefore, already been collecting materials for "a scene or two," as he wrote to his father-in-law, "which I believe you have seen in an odd act of a little farce." When Mr. Harris, the manager of Covent Garden, asked him to write a comedy, Sheridan answered his request by producing "The Rivals."

The play was written in something like six weeks, and as to its genesis there is some curious information in the author's preface to the published edition :—

> "Hurry in writing," he says, "has long been exploded as an excuse for an author—however, in the dramatic line, it may happen that both an author and a manager may wish to fill a chasm in the entertainment of the public with a hastiness not altogether culpable. The season was advanced when I first put the play into Mr. Harris's hands; it was at that time at least double the length of any acting comedy. I profited by his judgment and experience in curtailing of it, till, I believe, his feeling for the vanity of a young author got the better of his desire for correctness, and he left many excrescences remaining, because he had assisted in pruning so many more."

In consequence of Mr. Harris's kind-heartedness, when the play was produced on January 17, 1775, it was still by far too long. Added to this the character of Sir Lucius O'Trigger was apparently considered an offensive reflection upon Irish peculiarities, and its exponent Mr. Lee failed lamentably, in consequence of hostile demonstrations from the Hibernian portion of the audience, who were probably present in force to support their young fellow-countryman.[1] After a second trial, the play was judiciously withdrawn, to escape perpetual damnation, and submitted to considerable condensation. A new Sir Lucius was procured in the shape of Larry Clinch, an Irish friend of the elder Sheridan's, who did ample justice to the part. Further, Sheridan substituted for the original prologue—a somewhat flat dialogue between a serjeant-at-law, counsel for the poet, and an attorney—a new prologue, spoken by Mrs. Bulkley, the Julia of the play. The actress pointed to the figure of Comedy at the side of the stage, and told the audience to

"Look on her well—does she seem form'd to teach?
Should you *expect* to hear this lady—preach?
Is gray experience suited to her youth,
Do solemn sentiments become that mouth?
Bid her be grave, those lips would rebel prove
To every theme that slanders mirth or love.
Yet, thus adorned with every graceful art,
To charm the fancy and to reach the heart,
Must we displease her? and instead advance
The goddess of the woful countenance?—
The Sentimental Muse—Her emblems view—
The 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and a spring of rue!"

This second prologue is important, because it proves that there were reasons, apart from the imperfections incidental to the rapid production of an inexperienced hand, for the temporary failure and ultimate success of "The Rivals." As an acute American critic, Mr. Brander Matthews, has recently reminded us,[1] on the authority of John Bernard, afterwards one of the first of American managers, the play was disliked by the more conservative section of the audience, who regarded it as an unwarrantable departure from the sentimental comedy then in vogue.

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[1] Sheridan some years afterwards told Reynolds the playwright that during the violent opposition in the fifth act an apple hit Lee; whereupon he stepped forward and exclaimed in rich brogue, "By the powers is it *personal*. Is it me or the matter?" ("Reynolds's Life and Times," vol. ii. p. 227).

> "Faulkland and Julia," says Bernard, "which Sheridan had obviously introduced to conciliate the sentimentalists, but which in the present day are considered incumbrances, were the characters most favourably received, whilst Sir Anthony Absolute, Bob Acres, and Lydia, those faithful and diversified pictures of life, were barely tolerated."

Sentimental comedy was moribund, but it was dying hard. Originally introduced from France, in consequence of the disfavour into which the Restoration dramatists, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar, had fallen, through Jeremy Collier's formidable attack upon their inherent non-morality, this school had found its first exponent in Dick Steele, whose most successful efforts in its direction were "The Tender Husband," brought out in 1705, and "The Conscious Lovers," acted in 1722. Parson Adams, it will be remembered, found in the latter play "some things almost solemn enough for a sermon." Then followed a series of sickly plays, now deservedly forgotten: Moore's "Gamester," Whitehead's "School for Lovers," Hugh Kelly's

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[1] In the preface to his critical edition of Sheridan's Comedies, published in 1885.

"False Delicacy," ending with the earlier plays of the prolific Cumberland—"The Brothers," "The East Indian," and "The Fashionable Lover." Not that sentimental comedy had the field entirely to itself. Congreve's "Love for Love" still lingered on the stage; Wycherley's "Country Wife" had a new lease of life given it through Garrick's skilful adaptation, "The Country Girl;" and several other Restoration plays were acted from time to time. But the occasional revivals of the Restoration drama, and the still more occasional production of a new play of merit, like "High Life below Stairs," or "The Clandestine Marriage," can have effected but little more than to keep alive the memory of what true comedy was. It is to the rough-and-ready humour of Foote that the credit of dealing the death-blow to a false school is really due. "The Sentimental Housemaid, or Piety in Pattens," contained much keen and legitimate satire upon the prevailing mode, and effected a partial reform in taste, which saved "She Stoops to Conquer" from the condemnation which would otherwise have awaited it.

A breach, then, had been made in the fortress by Foote, and Goldsmith had already carried the enemy's main position when Sheridan appeared. His was a more direct return to the Restoration drama than that attempted by Goldsmith, a writer whose sweet unreasonableness declines to come under any ordinary category. Sheridan, on the other hand, is a true disciple of Farquhar and Congreve in everything but their almost monotonous devotion to cuckoldry. The humour of "The Rivals" is racially akin to that of "The Recruiting

Sergeant" and "Beaux' Stratagem," just as the wit of "The School for Scandal" is of the same genus as that of "The Way of the World" or "The Double-Dealer." Not that Sheridan was a conscious imitator either of Congreve or Farquhar. It is most improbable that he sat down to make a critical examination of their writings, and discover where they had succeeded, and where they had failed. But a man with the dramatic instinct in him must have felt it his duty to read such of their plays as he had not seen on the stage, and having done so he naturally became infected by their spirit. He saw that there was true comedy, and in that vein he resolved to write.

Few playwrights have been subjected to such persistent charges of plagiarism as Sheridan, and it is remarkable how insignificant really are the literary thefts that can be proved against him. It is evident that calumny began to wag its tongue against him as soon as "The Rivals" was put on the stage; and he retorted on his assailants honestly enough, by pleading lack of learning rather than want of invention.

> "I own that, in one respect, I did not regret my ignorance; for as my great wish in attempting a play was to avoid every appearance of plagiary, I thought I should stand a better chance of effecting this from being in a walk which I had not frequented, and where, consequently, the progress of invention was less likely to be interrupted by starts of recollection; for on subjects on which the mind has been much informed, invention is slow of exerting itself. Faded ideas float in the fancy like half-forgotten dreams; and the imagination in its fullest enjoyments becomes suspicious of its offspring, and doubts whether it has created or adopted."

Indeed, Sheridan's accusers attribute to him a knowledge of English literature, which might have been acquired after a lifetime of industrious research, but was hardly likely to be forthcoming in a young man of twenty-three, whose education had at best been desultory. Properly speaking, the only thefts that can really be brought home to him are from his mother, and thus they assume the character of possessions acquired by inheritance rather than by literary loot. As he took the name of one of his characters, Faulkland, from her novel, "Miss Sidney Biddulph," it is quite possible that he may have borrowed from the same source—as Boaden, in his "Life of Kemble," said he had—the unimportant scene in which Faulkland puts Julia to the trial, by pretending that his life was in danger and that he was compelled to fly. Sheridan's declaration to Rogers that he had never read the novel does not go for much, for he also denied having read Wycherley, a statement very difficult of belief. More extensive were his obligations to Mrs. Sheridan's unfinished comedy, "A Trip to Bath." It has been said, indeed, that "The Rivals" was founded on the latter play. But the whole plot and most of the characters are utterly dissimilar. "A Trip to Bath"—which, with some other manuscript plays which formerly belonged to Sheridan, was presented to the British Museum by Mr. Coventry Patmore, in 1864—turns on the efforts of two impecunious members of society—Lady Filmot and Lord Hewkly—to secure the hands and fortunes of Edward Bull, the son of Sir Jonathan Bull, a City knight, and Lucy Tryfort, the daughter of Mrs. Tryfort, a citizen's widow. Lord Hewkly persuades Lucy to pretend to be in love with him for the purpose, as he tells her, of annoying Lady Filmot, and Lady Filmot easily induces the uncultivated Edward to act as her cicisbeo at the Assembly Rooms, arrayed as a beau in borrowed plumes. Lucy and Edward are thereupon at cross purposes, and naturally become consumed by jealousy. As an under-plot there is the courtship of Lady Bel Aircastle, a superfine lady of quality, by Champignon, a vulgar West Indian, upon whom Lord Hewkly sponges The play breaks off at the close of the third act, when Lord Hewkly and Lady Filmot are for the time being triumphant. But as they still have a secret regard for one another, in spite of their attempts to bestow themselves elsewhere, and as Lucy's heart still beats true to Edward, it is not difficult to see how Mrs. Sheridan intended to wind up her lively comedy.

It is perfectly clear that, though the scene in both plays is laid at Bath, their plots have nothing whatever in common. Nor have the characters, with one exception, that of Mrs. Tryfort, who is undoubtedly the immediate source of Mrs. Malaprop. Several of her "derangements of epitaphs" appear in "The Rivals" with very little alteration. Mrs. Tryfort praises Lord Hewkly, "Oh, in everything, ma'am, he's a perfect progeny." Mrs. Malaprop says, "Observe me, Sir Anthony. I would by no means wish a daughter of mine to be a progeny of learning." Similarly, Mrs. Malaprop wishes that her daughter might know something of the "contagious countries;" and Mrs. Tryfort exclaims, "Oh, if you were to hear him describe contagious countries, as I have done, it would astonish you." "Sir," she says to Edward, "you are a little too pert, let me tell you, and so much taciturnity doesn't become a young man." Mrs. Malaprop, during the second scene of the second act, of "The Rivals," frequently lays down the law as to what doesn't become a young woman, "violent memories" being one of those qualities to which she takes exception. Again, Mrs. Tryfort says, "I know nothing of him [Edward], Sir Jonathan; do you think Miss Tryfort doesn't understand punctuality better than to go into corners with young men?" which may have suggested the "Female punctuation forbids me to say more" of Mrs. Malaprop's letter to Sir Lucius O'Trigger. And here are some more of Mrs. Tryfort's blunders, of which, however, Sheridan did not avail himself.

> "*Mrs. Tryfort.* I declare that it is a fatiguing life one leads, and exhilitates one's spirits so much that I have scarce strength enough to rise of a morning. . . .
>
> "*Mrs. Tryfort.* A silly chit that might be a countess if she had the grace to deserve it.
>
> "*Lucy.* But, madam, I don't desire it.
>
> "*Mrs. Tryfort.* There's for you, miss, a foolish metamorphosis!"

Another of the *dramatis personæ* in "A Trip to Bath" is Sir Jeremy Bull, Edward's uncle. Though as a ruined ex-member of Parliament, he has little in common with Sir Lucius O'Trigger, one of his sayings finds its way with little alteration into the Irishman's mouth. Sir Jeremy *loquitur:* "Why the land and the mansion-house have slipped thro' our fingers, boy; but, thank heaven, the family pictures are still extant." It is worth noticing, too, that one of the minor characters in "A Trip to Bath" is a lodging-house keeper, Mrs. Surface, whose house is described as "a mart of scandal," and who deals freely in that commodity while proclaiming her hatred of it. Sheridan was afterwards to borrow the name to some purpose.

Mrs. Tryfort is, then, the origin of Mrs. Malaprop, not Dogberry, or Fielding's Mrs. Slipslop, or Smollett's Mrs. Tabitha Bramble, though they are all generically akin, and though Sheridan may have borrowed from the last lady the incident of her being induced to believe that a proposal to her niece was addressed to herself. In the same way it is easy enough to find ancestors of Bob Acres, but the resemblance is never close enough to enable us to say that Sheridan deliberately copied. It is not impossible that he may have had vague recollections of Sir Andrew Ague-cheek in his mind when he wrote some of the scenes in which that hero figures. Similarly Sir Joseph Wittol, in Congreve's "Old Bachelor," anticipated Acres in the use of the "oath referential." "Gads—daggers—belts—blades—and scabbards," he exclaims, on one occasion, and his conduct, when confronted by danger, is very like that of "Fighting Bob."

> "No, no," he says, "hang't I was not afraid neither—though I confess he did in a manner snap me up—yet I can't say it was altogether out of fear, but partly to prevent mischief—for he was a devilish choleric fellow: and if my choler had been up too, agad, there would have been mischief done, that's flat. . . . Adsheart, if he should come just now, when I am angry, I'd tell him—mum."

So, too, Bob's clownish efforts to learn the cotillon remind one of the dancing-lesson of Mockmode in Farquhar's "Love and a Bottle." But the awkward and cowardly country bumpkin is surely a fairly obvious object of satire, and so is the romantic and novel-reading young lady. Sheridan certainly took a hint or two (so far as Lydia Languish was concerned) from Steele's "Tender Husband," where the niece spends her time in reading romances, is courted by her lover in disguise before her aunt's face, and agrees with Lydia that an elopement is preferable to a common-place marriage. Again there is a Lydia Bramble in "Humphrey Clinker," of whom her uncle Matthew says, "Truly she has got a languishing eye and reads romances." The plain fact of the matter is that Mrs. Malaprop, Acres, and Lydia Languish were all more or less stock-characters, in the same way as several of the incidents in "The Rivals" had undoubtedly been used before. But the originality of the plot as a whole, and of the *dramatis personæ* as a whole, can hardly be disputed by the most determined of criticasters.

What an admirable play is "The Rivals"! The plot is as simple as one of Farquhar's, yet there is a sufficiency of complication and an unbroken succession of humorous incidents. It is naturally and gradually developed; for Sheridan, fortunately for himself, was not tied down to the two or three set scenes which hamper the efforts of modern playwrights, and could introduce a conversation between Sir Lucius and Lucy without being obliged to drag the pair together, in defiance of probability, into Mrs. Malaprop's drawing-room or Bob Acres' lodgings. The only instance of abruptness is the introduction of the quarrel between Captain Absolute and Sir Lucius O'Trigger. It is led up to by a single remark in the scene in which Sir Lucius helps Acres to compose his challenge, and we are left in the dark as to the means by which Sir Lucius became aware that Captain Absolute, *qua* Absolute, was a suitor for the hand of Lydia Languish. Possibly some elucidatory matter went by the board after the two disastrous performances of the play, and we can be well content to rest satisfied with Sir Lucius' remark, "The quarrel is a very pretty quarrel as it stands; we should only spoil it by trying to explain it." The blemish is indeed microscopic, and carries little weight in the critical balance when opposed to the ingenuity of the truly delightful scene (act iii. scene 3) between Mrs. Malaprop, Captain Absolute, and Lydia Languish. Therein the captain is twice on the brink of exposure, and is saved on the first occasion by his own ready tongue, on the second by Lydia's unwitting use of ambiguous phrases, which are yet so easily introduced that the dialogue does not strike you as being in any degree forced.

It has been said, with some truth, that the loves of Faulkland and Julia have little to do with the main development of the plot. But two pairs of lovers were the regulation number, and until they get together Faulkland and Julia are both quite tolerable. Indeed, in the scenes with Captain Absolute the morbid and suspicious character of Faulkland makes an excellent foil to the easy-going and cocksure disposition of the captain. Nothing can be better in its way than Faulkland's outcry on hearing that Julia had been engaged in his absence in country dances:—

> "Now disappointment on her! Defend this, Absolute; why don't you defend this? Country dances! jigs and reels! Am I to blame now? A minuet I could have forgiven; I should not have minded that—I say I should not have regarded a minuet—but country dances! Zounds! had she made one in a cotillon I believe I should have forgiven even that! But to be monkey-led for a night!—to run the gauntlet through a string of amorous palming puppies! to show paces like a managed filly! Oh, Jack! there never can be but one man in the world whom a truly modest and delicate woman ought to pair with in a country dance; and, even then, the rest of the couples should be her great-uncles and aunts!"

When Faulkland and Julia are alone together it must be acknowledged that they are tiresome. But for years after the production of the play they were taken quite seriously, and Professor Smyth, in his little memoir of Sheridan, tells us that the audience used to melt into tears as it listened to them. Now people yawn. Sheridan, however, was wise in his generation, when he wrote the scenes in which they figure, and introduced into them some of his most elaborate ornamentation. His object was immediate success rather than the applause of posterity, which is of singularly little assistance towards the filling of an empty purse. He therefore made a concession to the prevailing taste, and made it in sober earnestness. It would be an anachronism, though a tempting one, no doubt, to imagine that he wrote with his tongue in his cheek when he penned their high-flown sentimentalities. Though he cut himself free from genteel comedy, he could hardly fail to be influenced by it to a certain degree, and probably a good deal more than he was at all aware.

Good in its way though the plot of "The Rivals" is, the merits of the play depend upon its characters and its dialogue. Both of these are true rather to the stage than to nature, and "The Rivals," like all Sheridan's plays, gains immensely by representation. It has indeed been suggested that Sheridan in this play transcribed his own experiences of life.//[According to that theory Captain Absolute's pursuit of Lydia Languish was suggested by his own courtship of Miss Linley, and the duel scene by his own combats with Mathews. But the facts in the two cases are utterly dissimilar—in the one there was not, in the other there was, an elopement; in the one there was not, in the other there was, a duel. And though Mrs. Sheridan's character, as portrayed by Professor Smyth on the somewhat malevolent authority of her neighbour, Mrs. Canning, does bear a faint resemblance to that of Lydia Languish, the identification is the merest guess-work. In fact, the only supposition that has any real probability is that which identifies Sheridan himself with Faulkland, and here again there are difficulties in the way of proof. The keynote to the differences of Faulkland and Julia is that they have been destined for each other by her father. She says, "I see you are determined to be unkind! The contract which my poor father bound us in gives you more than a lover's privilege." And he replies, "Again, Julia, you raise ideas that feed and justify my doubts. I would not have been more free—no—I am proud of my restraint. Yet—yet—perhaps your high respect alone for this solemn compact has fettered your inclinations, which else had made a worthier choice."] [Now old Sheridan's opposition to his son's marriage was most determined. Besides, as Mr. Brander

[Matthews has pointed out, Sheridan, who would not let his wife sing in public, was the last man in the world to put the story of his courtship on the stage. The jealous lover is a common enough figure in comedy in all conscience, and if we must have a prototype for Faulkland, a fairly evident one can be found in the Valentine of Wycherley's "Love in a Wood."] .

[The more strongly drawn characters of the play are still more obviously the creations of Sheridan's brain, aided by hints from novels that he had read and plays that he had seen. Sheridan, when he wrote "The Rivals," though his experience of life had been varied and considerable, was too young to have made a deep study of human nature. Even with ripened knowledge he never attempted to go beneath the surface of character, but remained to the last content to reproduce external oddities, and the current manners of society. He could create an Acres, but could not create a Falstaff. He certainly never attempted to do so, and no one in their senses ever dreamt of comparing him with Shakespeare or Molière; he is altogether on a different and lower plane. Nor did he ever desire to make his characters conform to, or depart from, other than a purely conventional system of morality, and even within those limits troubled himself little with consistency compared with effect. He knew his limits; he knew perfectly well that he could never have written "The Alchemist" or "Volpone," with their solemn purpose and deep philosophy of life.] Accordingly he remained to the last as purely non-moral as Congreve or Vanbrugh; and, though he indirectly did lip-service to the Young

Person by refraining from making cuckoldry the sole pivot of his plays, it may be suspected that in his heart of hearts he cordially despised her, and wished that she was abolished.

Even in the artificial world to which he confined himself, the world of the footlights, Sheridan in this his first play not unfrequently outrages probability; Bob Acres and Mrs. Malaprop are deliberate caricatures. The lady's verbal misapplications, especially, are too elaborate and too constant for art. Sheridan had got hold of a good idea, and he rode it to death. An uneducated woman who attempts fine language is liable to ludicrous mistakes enough, but she would never have uttered the volleys of absurdities which occur in Mrs. Malaprop's celebrated discourse on education. Her more ornate flights of blundering—"Sure if I reprehend anything in the world it is the use of my oracular tongue and a nice derangement of epitaphs," for instance—are so elaborately ingenious that they are evidently not the natural utterances of the character, but the conscious efforts of the dramatist. So, too, Acres' absurdities are too numerous and too unrelieved by any redeeming quality. He is a combination of a poltroon and a would-be man of fashion, with the attributes of both exaggerated, and his oaths fit the occasion far too well to have been elaborated by the intelligence of a country squire. In fact, he treads dangerously near the well-defined borderline which separates comedy from farce. But again we can only say that Sheridan's comedy is intended for the theatre not the study, and for the edification of the pit as well as that of the stalls. When we see it upon the stage our criticism is fairly disarmed by laughter, and it is only reasonable to judge a playwright by canons which he would have himself acknowledged. Acres may be more than forgiven for the duel scene.

Far more subtle than Mrs. Malaprop and Acres are the characters of Sir Lucius O'Trigger and Sir Anthony Absolute. Why the audience took offence at the former must pass the wit of man to decide. He is thoroughly well-bred; even the flippant Lucy acknowledges that he has "too much pride and delicacy to sacrifice the feelings of a gentleman to the necessities of his fortune;" and when his schemes have failed he treats Mrs. Malaprop with a degree of consideration which she but ill requites by calling him a Vandyke. It is evident that Sheridan at first intended to put a string of bulls into his mouth. Sir Lucius begins well by informing Lucy that the probable reason why they did not meet was because he was on the South Parade and she was on the North, and that "it is very comical too how you should go out and I not see you, for I was only taking a nap at the Parade Coffee House." But Sheridan probably came to the conclusion that bulls in addition to Mrs. Malaprop's blunders would be rather too large an order, and Sir Lucius was confined to the grim humours of, "I'm told there's very snug lying in the Abbey." Sir Anthony is an altogether delightful personage, superior by an immense altitude to the ordinary choleric father of comedy. Excellent is the touch, "Damn me if ever I call you Jack again," and still better his delight when he imagines that Captain Absolute has been too free with Lydia Languish. "Come, no excuses, Jack; why, your father, you rogue, was so before you—the blood of the Absolutes was always impatient." The scene (act iii. scene 1) in which he describes the charms of Lydia Languish, and is suddenly thrown into a fury by the question, "Which is to be mine, sir, the niece or the aunt?" is, as Moore points out, perhaps the best in the comedy. But it is unnecessary to quote a passage from a play which is easily accessible, and in which many of the present generation have probably had the privilege of seeing Mr. William Farren.]

[The dialogue of "The Rivals" is not so exquisitely polished as that of "The School for Scandal," and, if less effective on the stage, it is a good deal more natural. Probably the very haste in which the play was written saved it from over-elaboration, not that there is the slightest trace of slovenliness from first to last. On the contrary, the balance of sentence is maintained throughout, and how a young man, whose education had been limited, and who could not spell, contrived to turn out such excellent prose is a question that can be more easily asked than answered. No doubt, however, the lessons in rhetoric which he had received from his father were of considerable benefit to him, for much of the dialogue, notably Faulkland's longer speeches and Captain Absolute's outburst to Lydia Languish in scene 3 of act iii., looks as if it had been formed on oratorical models. But discussions on the origin of style are apt to be conjectural rather than improving. It would be fatuous to deny there are to be found in the play numerous instances of that false ornamentation from which nothing either written or spoken by Sheridan was ever entirely free. The tag with which Julia brings down the curtain in the last act is a glaring instance, and Sir Anthony Absolute's description of the circulating library is far too elaborate to be put in the mouth even of a stage country gentleman. /

> "*Sir Anth.* Madam, a circulating library in a town is as an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge! It blossoms through the year!—and, depend upon it, Mrs. Malaprop, that they who are so fond of handling the leaves will long for the fruit at last."

/ The inappropriateness of the dialogue to the character to whom it is assigned is of course more conspicuous when we come to the servants. Thomas is indeed an exception. Thomas says little that might not be forthcoming from a rustic humourist, and, what is more, talks very fair Devonshire—"a mort" for a heap or a quantity, and "the stuff" for money, being still common expressions in that county. But David's remark that our ancestors are very good kind of folks, but they are the last people he would choose to have a visiting acquaintance with, seems rather out of place, and Fag's conceits especially smack of the drawing-room not of the servants' hall, notably the famous classical allusion to "Love who has been a masquerader ever since the days of Jupiter." But if Sheridan sinned in making his valets as witty and cultured as their masters, he sinned in very good company. Congreve's servants all talk the language of good society, and more than one man-servant of the Restoration drama airs his knowledge of Latin and Greek. Thus Jeremy in "Love for Love," who to be sure had been a gyp at Cambridge, is learned about Nilus, and Scrub in "The Beaux' Stratagem" exclaims on very slight provocation, "Cedunt arma togæ." It may well be that a young man of twenty-three was too impressed with the merits of his masters to note their defects. But Sheridan was always wide awake, and it is more probable that he had a shrewd inkling that by making—to use Macaulay's phrase—his characters in his own likeness, his play would command the applause of the playgoer, though it might earn the censure of the psychologist. And, after all, the exhibition of too much wit is a fault on the right side.

CHAPTER III.

"THE RIVALS" ran at Covent Garden for fourteen nights, and was a most unqualified success in the provinces, notably at Bath, Bristol, and Southampton. But Sheridan was not at all inclined to rest on his laurels. Out of gratitude to Clinch, who had so largely helped to save "The Rivals," he wrote for that actor's benefit the farce called "St. Patrick's Day, or, The Scheming Lieutenant." It was brought out on the 2nd of May, 1775, and was acted six times before the close of the season.

"St. Patrick's Day" no longer holds the stage, and its six changes of scene in two short acts are no doubt a serious consideration against its revival in the present days of solid and costly accessories. But it is a bright little farce, obviously founded, much as was Wycherley's "Gentleman Dancing-master," upon Molière. Of Molière in the original Sheridan probably knew little, for his acquaintance with the French language was very limited, and when he and Dundas thought fit to discuss the meaning of the word "malheureux"—pronounced "maleroo"—in a despatch, the House of Commons laughed at them consumedly. But it is obvious that he must have studied the great French dramatist, notably his "École des Femmes," in some translation, when he rattled off "St. Patrick's Day."

The story is simple enough, but is perhaps worth retelling. Lieutenant O'Connor is in love with Lauretta, the daughter of Justice Credulous, but the old man will not hear of the match. Accordingly the Lieutenant persuades his friend Dr. Rosy to present him to the Justice in the disguise of a countryman, Humphrey Hum, who is recommended as Lauretta's guardian against the desperate schemes of O'Connor. At first all goes well; the disguised Lieutenant administers a mock beating to three of his own soldiers, and wins the entire confidence of Credulous. But he is promptly discovered kissing the young lady, and ordered off the premises. His discomfiture is short, however, as he quickly sends a letter to Credulous, in which he declares that he has that morning administered a dose of poison to the Justice in his chocolate. In great alarm, Credulous accepts Rosy's suggestion that a German quack, who is hard by, should be called in to administer an antidote. The quack is O'Connor in a fresh disguise; he declares himself prepared to restore the Justice if he will consent to his union with Lauretta, and then writes the prescription, "In reading this you are cured, by your affectionate son-in-law, O'Connor." Credulous is naturally furious, but comes to the conclusion he will at any rate disappoint his wife's obvious anxiety to get hold of his estate, and surrenders the girl to her lover. The dialogue is sufficiently amusing, though not in Sheridan's best manner. Dr. Rosy's moralizings to his departed Dolly are capital

—"such an arm for a bandage—veins that seemed to invite the lancet. Then her skin, smooth and white as a gallipot." So too is Mrs. Credulous's description of a soldier husband.

> "Oh, barbarous! to want a husband that may wed you to-day, and be sent the Lord knows where before night; then in a twelvemonth perhaps to have him come like a Colossus, with one leg at New York and the other at Chelsea Hospital."

All through the summer, Sheridan worked hard at a comic opera, the music of which was selected and composed by his father-in-law, Mr. Linley. The pair conducted their labours chiefly by correspondence, as Linley had a professional engagement at Bath, and Sheridan's letters, as published by Moore, are interesting as showing the unmethodical energy which he could, when he chose, put into his work. He was most minute and persistent in his hints to Mr. Linley, and though he had no technical training in music, yet he displayed much practical knowledge of its effect upon the stage. No doubt he was helped to a very considerable extent by his accomplished wife. "Dearest father," she writes, "I have no spirits or hopes of the opera unless we see you," and it will be observed that Sheridan, in his directions to Mr. Linley, speaks in the plural more often than in the singular.

> "The enclosed are the words for 'Wind, gentle evergreen;' a passionate song for Mattocks, and another for Miss Brown, which I solicit to be clothed in melody by you, and are all I want. Mattocks's I could wish to be a broken, passionate affair, and the first two lines may be recitative, or what you please, uncommon. Miss

Brown sings hers in a joyful mood: we want her to show in it as much execution as she is capable of, which is pretty well; and, for variety, we want Mr. Simpson's hautboy to cut a figure with replying passages, &c., in the way of Fisher's '*M'ami il bel idol mio*,' to abet which I have lugged in Echo, who is always allowed to play her part."[1]

Mr. Linley, though he submitted in the end, seems at first to have resented the dictation of a young spark, who did not know a note of music, while his artistic feelings were outraged by the use that was made of other people's compositions, though he might have found consolation in the example of "The Beggar's Opera." He vented his feelings in a letter to Garrick, which is to be found in the Garrick Correspondence.

"I have promised to assist Sheridan in compiling—I believe this is the properest term—an opera, which I understand from him he has engaged to produce at Covent Garden this season. I have already set some airs which he has given me, and he intends writing new words to some tunes of mine. My son has likewise written some tunes for him, and I understand he is to have some others from Mr. Jackson of Exeter. This is a mode of proceeding in regard to his composition which I by no means approve of. I think he ought first to have finished his opera with the songs he intends to introduce into it, and have got it entirely new set. No musician can set a song properly unless he understands the character and knows the performer who is to exhibit it. . . . I would not have been concerned in this business at all, but that I know there is an absolute necessity for him to endeavour to get some money by this means, and he will not be persuaded upon to let his wife sing, and indeed at present she is incapable, and nature will not permit me to be indifferent to his success."

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[1] Mattocks' song was finally omitted. He was the Don Ferdinand of the piece. But Miss Brown's is Donna Clara's song in the third act.

"Adieu, thou dreary pile, where never dies
The sullen echo of repentant sighs!
Ye sister mourners of each lonely cell
Inured to hymns and sorrow, fare ye well!
For happier scenes I fly this lonesome grove
To saints a prison, but a tomb to love."

Every one with whom Sheridan had to work was inclined from time to time to kick against his disorderly method of procedure, but in the end they had little cause to regret the partnership. Mr. Linley would have written in a very different strain after the piece was fairly launched.

"The Duenna" was performed at Covent Garden on the 21st of November, 1775. It had an unprecedented run of seventy-five nights, as against the sixty-three of "The Beggar's Opera." Moore declares that its attractions seriously diminished the audiences at Drury Lane. Garrick, he tells us, was even compelled to have recourse to the expedient of playing off the mother against the son by reviving Mrs. Sheridan's comedy, "The Discovery." "The old woman," it was said, "would be the death of the old man." But the story is obviously absurd. There is contemporary evidence that Drury Lane was drawing enormous houses, Garrick's approaching retirement from the stage having already been hinted abroad. Besides, the English Roscius was at this time in treaty with Sheridan for the purchase of his share of the theatre, and the revival of his mother's comedy, if made with any deliberate intention, was far more likely to have been made in the spirit of compliment than of rivalry. It seems Garrick only acted Sir

Anthony Branville six nights, and the simple explanation would appear to be that, as one of his favourite and less fatiguing parts, it was assumed without any afterthought whatever.

Much of the popularity of "The Duenna" was evidently gained by the music, of which what was not Mr. Linley's was selected from the well-known airs of Dr. Harrington, Rauzzini, Jackson, and other composers. But Sheridan's songs have intrinsic merits, and are deservedly remembered apart from their setting. Though, perhaps, of no very high order of poetry—Sheridan was never more than a writer of clever verses—they are far superior in literary execution to the halting rhymes and florid sentiments of ordinary comic opera, and are at once sparkling and refined. Curiously enough Sheridan's livelier efforts are hardly so successful as those in which he appealed to the gentler emotions of his audience. Don Jerome's, "Oh, the days when I was young," once in the mouth of every street-boy, is now almost forgotten. But "Had I a heart for falsehood framed," "I ne'er could any lustre see," and "Oh, had my love ne'er smiled on me," seem secure of immortality, though "The Duenna" left the stage with Braham. Perhaps the most ambitious song in the opera is Donna Clara's, in the fifth scene of the first act, and it comes nearest to true poetry, in spite of Moore's rather captious objection to the fourth line:

"When sable night, each drooping plant restoring,
Wept o'er the flowers her breath did cheer,
As some sad widow o'er her babe deploring,
Wakes its beauty with a tear:

> When all did sleep, whose weary hearts did borrow
> One hour from love and care to rest;
> Lo! as I press'd my couch in silent sorrow,
> My lover caught me to his breast!"

The plot of "The Duenna" contains some ingenious though rather common-place complications, and is quite sufficient for its three acts, without placing a very severe strain upon the intellectual faculties of the audience. Moore thinks that the central incident was suggested by the scene in Wycherley's "Country Girl," in which Mrs. Pinchwife escapes from the house of her jealous husband in her sister-in-law's clothes. But disguise is surely common enough in comic opera, and the general scheme of "The Duenna" seems to suggest Molière rather than Wycherley. As the opera is never acted now, and but little read, a short description of the plot may not be amiss. It turns upon the efforts of Don Jerome to prevent his daughter Louisa from marrying her lover, Don Antonio, by forcing her into matrimony with Isaac, a recently converted Jew. The girl and the Duenna together contrive to outwit the old man. The Duenna is caught by him in the act of conveying a letter from Antonio, and is promptly ordered out of the house. It is however Louisa, disguised in the old woman's cardinal and veil, not the Duenna, who is turned out. She meets her friend Donna Clara, an old flame of Antonio's, but now in love with Louisa's brother Ferdinand, though there is a temporary coolness between the pair owing to his importunity. Clara is about to take refuge in a convent from her lover and stepmother, and thither Louisa resolves to follow her if she can find Antonio.

This she effects through Isaac himself, who has never seen her, and is therefore easily gulled by her use of Clara's name into bringing the lovers together in his own lodgings. The second act opens with Isaac's courtship of the Duenna, who has been locked by Don Jerome into her mistress's room, and the scenes in which his expectations are excited by the old man's enthusiastic descriptions of his daughter's charms, only to be dashed to the ground by the sight of the hideous old harridan, are extremely amusing, though the humour is occasionally not far removed from vulgarity. It is needless to state that the Jew's cupidity gets the better of his disappointment, and he readily accepts the Duenna's proposal that he should elope with her. After some incidental scenes the two pairs of lovers meet at a Priory; there Clara and Ferdinand are reconciled, and they all—including Isaac and the Duenna, who have also found their way thither—are united in wedlock by a jovial monk, Father Paul. The usual explanations follow at Don Jerome's house, and with the forgiveness of the lovers and the discomfiture of Isaac, the curtain falls.

The characters in "The Duenna" are conventional, and there is little attempt to give them individuality with the exception of Isaac. He is very well drawn, supremely proud of his own cleverness, "roguish, you'll say, but keen, hey? devilish keen!" and invariably made the dupe of every one whom he comes across. Originally he was supplied with a friend of the same stamp, styled Cousin Moses; but the part was cut down—either, as Moore says, because it would apply too personally to its creator Leoni, or, according to another story, because

Leoni's English was limited—until there remains an unimportant and colourless person called Carlos. The Duenna herself has few distinguishing features beyond her ugliness, which is made the subject of some very homespun wit on the part of Isaac; and the airy Antonio, the jealous Ferdinand, and the irascible Don Jerome are little better than the ghosts of Captain Absolute, Faulkland, and Sir Anthony. Sheridan probably thought that elaboration of character and pointed dialogue were wasted on a comic opera, and it is quite possible that more than one member of the company may have been, as Sir Walter Scott said of Braham, Leoni's successor in the part of Carlos, "a beast of an actor, though an angel of a singer." He certainly troubled himself remarkably little about local colour, any more than did Vanbrugh in his least satisfactory comedy, "The False Friend," the scene of which is also laid in Spain. It was enough that the dialogue was bright and easily delivered; he seems to have aimed at little more. Here and there is a touch of his own peculiar fancy; for instance, the description of the recently converted Jew, Isaac, "standing like a blank page between the Old and the New Testament." But, on the whole, "The Duenna" does not contain much that is really worthy of him, and Byron was but a partial critic when, by styling it "the best opera" in our language, he ranked it above Gay's masterpiece with its Captain Macheath and Polly Peachum.

Certain it is that Sheridan does not seem to have set great store by the book of the opera. He never took the trouble to revise any of the printed editions, and several of them do not include one of its best songs, "Ah, cruel maid, how hast thou chang'd." Many years afterwards, in 1807, Kelly the musician and singer, left the printed play of "The Duenna" on his table, after looking over the part of Ferdinand which he was to perform that evening. On his return home he found Sheridan reading it, and correcting it as he read. To his question, "Do you act the part of Ferdinand from this printed copy?" Kelly replied in the affirmative, and added that he had done so for twenty years. "Then," said Sheridan, "you have been acting great nonsense," and corrected every sentence before he left the room. The corrections were preserved by Kelly in Sheridan's own handwriting, but he does not seem to have published them. It is quite possible, then, that the text of "The Duenna" is not particularly correct. But, at least, it does not seem to be disfigured by the gags of subsequent generations of actors, though a very vulgar interpolation is constantly introduced on the present stage into Bob Acres' challenge in "The Rivals," though a meaningless "I'll take my oath of that" is put into the mouth of Moses in "The School for Scandal," and though "The Critic" is translated out of all recognition by extravagant business and exaggerated clowning.

CHAPTER IV.

A FIVE-ACT comedy, a two-act farce, and a three-act comic opera, were not a bad year's work. At the beginning of 1775 Sheridan was an unknown literary tyro; at its close the first dramatist of his time. He was in great request as a writer of prologues and epilogues, a class of composition peculiarly suited to his somewhat ostentatious muse. Thus to Savage's tragedy of "Sir Thomas Overbury," which was revived at Covent Garden in February, 1777, he contributed a prologue which contained a well-turned compliment to Savage's biographer, Dr. Johnson:—

> "So pleads the tale that gives to future times
> The son's misfortunes, and the parents' crimes.
> There shall his fame (if own'd to-night) survive,
> Fixed by the hand that bids our language live."

The Doctor was evidently delighted by the young man's discriminating praise, and hastened to return the compliment. Some six weeks afterwards he proposed, and of course carried, the election of Sheridan as a member of the Literary Club, observing: "He who has written the two best comedies of the age is surely a considerable man."[1]

Meanwhile Sheridan, in conjunction with Linley and Dr. Ford, was in communication with Garrick for the purchase of his share in Drury Lane Theatre, and the bargain, after many delays, was concluded in June, 1776. The theatre was valued at £70,000, so that Garrick's half was worth £35,000. It was agreed that Dr. Ford should find £15,000; Sheridan and Mr. Linley £10,000 each. Whence Sheridan obtained the money has, until recent years, been a mystery, for not only did he raise the original £10,000, but two years later, dissensions having arisen between the new partners and Willoughby Lacy, the last was bought out by Sheridan for "a price exceeding £45,000." But Mr. Brander Matthews can fairly claim to have solved the difficulty. Here is his most ingenious explanation :—

> "Of the original £35,000 paid Garrick, Sheridan was to find £10,000. Dr. Watkins asserts that he raised £8,700 of this £10,000 by two mortgages, one of £1,000 to a Mr. Wallis, and another of £7,700 to Dr. Ford. If we accept this assertion—and I see no reason why we should not—all that Sheridan had to make up was £1,300, a sum which he could easily compass after the success of 'The Rivals' and 'The Duenna,' even supposing he did not encroach on, or had already exhausted, the £3,000 settled on his wife by Mr. Long. . . . A note in Sheridan's handwriting, quoted by Moore, states that Lacy was paid 'a price exceeding £45,000,' which would go to show that the total value of the property had risen in two years from £70,000 to £90,000. Most writers on the subject have taken this note of Sheridan's to mean

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[1] That is, "The Rivals" and "The Duenna," though the latter is hardly a comedy.

that he paid at least £45,000 in cash, and they have all exhausted their efforts in guessing where he got the money. But if we compare Moore's statement with Watkins's we get nearer a solution of the difficulty. Watkins says that Lacy's share was already mortgaged for £31,500, and that Sheridan assumed the mortgage, and agreed further to pay in return for the equity of redemption two annuities at £500 each. This double obligation (the mortgage for £31,500 and the annuities) represents 'a price exceeding £45,000,' but did not require a single penny in cash. On the contrary, the purchase of Lacy's half of the theatre actually put money into Sheridan's pocket, for he at once divided his original one-seventh between Linley and Dr. Ford, making each of their shares up to one-fourth; and even if they paid him no increase on the original price, he would have been enabled to pay off the £8,700 mortgages to Dr. Ford and to Mr. Wallis, and to get back the £1,300 which he seems to have advanced himself. In fact, it appears that Sheridan invested only £1,300 in cash when he bought one-seventh of Drury Lane Theatre in 1776, and that he received this back when he became possessed of one-half of Drury Lane Theatre in 1778, then valued at £90,000."[1]

[1] Among the documents quoted in *The English Illustrated Magazine* is a memorandum of Sheridan's anent the purchase of Lacy's share, in which the figures differ from those of Dr. Watkins and Moore, but not to such an extent as to affect materially Mr. Brander Matthews's argument. Supposing it to be genuine—and it certainly looks so—we may have in it the final terms of an agreement, of which Moore could only discover the preliminary negotiations. The figures are:—

Exceeding	£31,000
The *share* in the debt of the new management, *much* to be attributed to Mr. Lacy	1,500
To pay him in money, every shilling paid ...	7,500
To secure on the theatre an annuity of £1,000 on the lives of Langford and Mr. Lacy £500 each	16,000
	£56,000

Dr. Watkins further suggests that when Sheridan borrowed the £7,700 from Dr. Ford, Garrick stood behind Ford. But the last statement is certainly incorrect. It appears from the Garrick Papers (vol. ii. p. 293) that Garrick had already lent £22,000 to Lacy on mortgage, which he allowed to remain on loan under the new partnership. The careful David certainly did not lend any more, for when, shortly afterwards, he found it necessary to press the new management for his interest, the £22,000 alone is mentioned, and nothing is said about a new loan (Ibid. p. 303). So that the legend about Garrick having come to the rescue of a brother genius in distress must be abandoned. His assistance was purely negative, and consisted in his not withdrawing his money from the speculation, and that after all was something. But Drury Lane was evidently regarded as good security, for Linley had no difficulty in raising his money at four per cent. Whether, therefore, Dr. Ford was financially sound, or whether he was a man of straw with a "Little Premium" at his back, does not seem to be a very important question.

The new management opened on September 21, 1776, and did not begin well. Sheridan had nothing ready, and was compelled to fall back upon "The Rivals," transferred from Covent Garden, and a revival of Congreve's "Old Bachelor." Nor did "Semiramis," an indifferent tragedy by Captain Ayscough, remedy matters, though Sheridan contributed an epilogue to it, in which the lady spectator was bade—

> " Go, search, where keener woes demand relief,
> Go, while thy heart yet beats with fancied grief;

> Thy lip still conscious of the recent sigh,
> The grateful tear still quivering in thine eye.
> Go—and on real misery bestow
> The blest effusions of fictitious woe."

Worse was to follow. In October Lacy attempted to infringe the deed of partnership by introducing two new partners into the business. Sheridan thereupon took the extreme step of seceding from the theatre for several days, and the actors, following his example, shammed sickness when summoned by the prompter. King and Smith, the future Sir Peter Teazle and Charles Surface, were chief among the malingerers. To Sheridan the whole affair seemed an excellent joke, and he wrote to Garrick on the 15th:—

> "Indeed, never was known such an uncommon epidemic disorder as has raged among our unfortunate company; it differs only from the plague by attacking the better sort first. The manner, too, in which they are seized, I am told, is very extraordinary; many who were in perfect health at one moment, on receiving a billet from the prompter to summon them to business, are seized with sudden qualms, and before they can get through the contents, are absolutely unfit to leave their rooms; so that Hopkins's notes seem to operate like what we hear of Italian poisoned letters, which strike with sickness those to whom they are addressed. In short, if a successful author had given the company a dinner at Salt Hill, the effects could not be more injurious to our dramatic representatives."

His imperturbability carried the day. Lacy was compelled to write an apology to the public, and Sheridan returned to his duties. But it is evident that harmony did not long continue, for two years later Lacy, as we have seen, was bought out.

During all these troubles Garrick continued to advise Sheridan, and it was probably on his instigation that the new manager wrote, as his first contribution to the stock of Drury Lane, an adaptation of Vanbrugh's comedy, "The Relapse," which was brought out on the 24th of February, 1777, under the title of "A Trip to Scarborough." At first the audience would not have it on any terms; they wanted Sheridan, not Bowdlerized Vanbrugh. Lord Foppington—stap his vitals—failed to please, though played by Dodd, the creator of Sir Benjamin Backbite; and even the conjunction on the stage of the wit of Mrs. Abington and the beauty of Miss Farren and Mrs. Robinson was not acceptable. But before many years had passed "A Trip to Scarborough" had become a favourite play, and Mrs. Jordan's Miss Hoyden was always considered one of that charming actress's most popular impersonations. Even at the present day "A Trip to Scarborough," if well acted, would be sure of a good run. For Sheridan has succeeded in a task before which the most courageous of modern adapters would probably quail. He has contrived, to quote Garrick's prologue—

> "To draw some slender covering o'er
> That graceless wit which was too bare before"—

without material injury to Lord Foppington, perhaps the best individual character in the whole range of the Restoration drama.[1]

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[1] The allusion is to Pope's line—

> "And Van wants grace that never wanted wit.'

Since the above paragraph was written a successful adaptation

It is possible that "A Trip to Scarborough" was only intended by Sheridan for a stop-gap, for he was hard at work on "The School for Scandal," which was at length performed on the 8th of May, 1777. The anxiety of those concerned in its production must have been considerable. Though Garrick was keenly interested in the comedy, to which he contributed the prologue, Sheridan was behindhand with the dialogue, as was afterwards the case with "The Critic" and "Pizarro." The play was announced before the copy was in the hands of the actors, and the last five scenes had to be dashed off *currente calamo*. "Finished at last, thank God," wrote Sheridan on the last leaf, to which outburst of piety Hopkins the prompter added a cordial "Amen." But another trial was in store for the management. On the night before the performance the license was refused, on the ground that Moses was regarded as a satire on a money-lender who had recently been before the public as a candidate for the office of city chamberlain in opposition to Wilkes. Sheridan easily persuaded Lord Hertford, the Lord Chamberlain, to grant the license; but for the moment he must have thought that the stars were fighting against him. When the play was at last produced and had gained an unequivocal triumph, it was only natural that, as he told Lord Byron, he should have got very drunk, and have been taken to the watch-house for making a row in the street.

"The School for Scandal" ran twenty nights in its

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of "The Relapse," by Mr. Robert Buchanan, has been produced at the Vaudeville Theatre, under the title of "Miss Tom-boy."

first season, and sixty-five in its second. For several years it continued to be acted regularly three nights a week, and brought in nearly twice as much as any other play. "'The School for Scandal,'" recorded the Treasurer of Drury Lane in 1779, "damped the new pieces." It has retained its extraordinary popularity throughout the present century. It has been revived times without number in England and the United States, and has been translated into nearly every European language and even into Hindustani. But though nearly every great actor since Sheridan's time has been associated with "The School for Scandal," it may fearlessly be asserted that no collective performance, and few individual impersonations, have ever equalled those of the company which created the play. Horace Walpole records that there were "more parts performed admirably in 'The School for Scandal' than he almost ever saw in any play." Charles Lamb too declares that "no piece was ever so completely cast in all its parts as this manager's comedy," and Lamb saw the whole of the original company except Smith who had been succeeded in Charles Surface by Kemble, and Mrs. Abington who had been followed as Lady Teazle by Miss Farren. Indeed it is evident that Sheridan, as every good dramatist should, deliberately set himself to fit a company, which, unlike that of "The Rivals," consisted of actors who were already at the top of their profession. He told Rogers that he did not bring Charles Surface and Maria together until the last act, because neither Smith nor Miss Hopkins could safely be trusted with a love scene. Otherwise Smith, the Delaunay of his time, must have been an ideal Charles; and his successor Kemble, rather to our astonishment, is described by Lamb as having been very good. "His harshest tones became steeped and dulcified in good humour. He made his defects a grace. Not one of his sparkling sentences was lost." But the performer whom Lamb selects for special praise is John Palmer, who by his consummate acting made Joseph Surface rather than Charles the hero of the piece, with his "gay boldness, the graceful solemn plausibility, the measured step, the insinuating voice—to express it in a word—the downright *acted* villainy of the part." King, too, the original Lord Ogleby of "The Clandestine Marriage," was admirable as Sir Peter Teazle; so were Parsons as Crabtree and Dodd as Sir Benjamin Backbite; Baddeley as Moses gave one of his elaborate studies of Jewish character. Miss Pope, the Mrs. Candour, was, says Lamb, "the perfect gentlewoman as distinguished from the fine lady of comedy." Mrs. Abington was forty when she first played Lady Teazle, but no one seems to have thought that she looked too old for the part. On the contrary, Horace Walpole describes her acting in the character as equal to the first of her profession, as superior to any effort of Garrick's; she seemed to him, indeed, "the very person." About her successor, Miss Farren, Charles Lamb is rather ungallantly silent, but Sheridan thought highly of her. "God bless you," he said when she retired from the stage, "Lady Teazle is no more, and 'The School for Scandal' has broke up for the holidays." Altogether one can well understand the force of Lamb's contention that 'amid the mortifying circumstances attendant upon growing old, it was something to have seen 'The School for Scandal' in its glory."

"The School for Scandal" depended a good deal on its interpretation, for it is like "The Rivals" distinctly a play to be heard sooner than read. Its wit is brilliant rather than subtle, and its characters lend themselves to exhibition rather than study. Hazlitt, in his "Lectures on the Comic Writers," has well described the spectacular nature of Sheridan's talents, which find their best expression in his masterpiece, "The School for Scandal."

> "This," he says, "is the merit of Sheridan's comedies, that everything in them *tells*; there is no labour in vain. His comic muse does not go about prying into obscure corners, or collecting idle curiosities, but shows her laughing face, and points to her rich treasure—the follies of mankind. She is garlanded and crowned with roses and vine-leaves. Her eyes sparkle with delight, and her heart runs over with good-natured malice. Her step is firm and light, and her ornaments consummate! 'The School for Scandal' is, if not the most original, perhaps the most finished and faultless comedy which we have. When it is acted you hear people round you exclaiming, 'Surely it is impossible for anything to be cleverer.' The scene in which Charles sells all the old family pictures but his uncle's, who is the purchaser in disguise, and that of the discovery of Lady Teazle when the screen falls, are among the happiest and most highly wrought that comedy in its wide and brilliant range can boast."

The opinion of Horace Walpole upon matters of taste is always entitled to respect even where it fails to command acquiescence, and though considerably less favourable, it was much the same as Hazlitt's. "There is," he wrote, "a deal of wit and good situations; but it is too long, has two or three bad scenes which might easily be omitted, and seemed to want nature and truth of character." That is, he agrees with Hazlitt in attributing the merits of the comedy to the dialogue from first to last, and to the auction and screen-scenes. And in the dialogue Sheridan is certainly seen at his best. Though not so humorous as in "The Rivals" he is certainly more pointed. The level of excellence is higher and the ornamentation more evenly arranged upon the surface of the general structure. How Sheridan laboured over the play we know from Moore, who shows how each scene was cast and recast, and each phrase fashioned and re-fashioned, until every unnecessary epithet had disappeared and every redundant phrase had been eliminated. Moore has been blamed for thus opening the door of Sheridan's laboratory, but it is difficult to see why. No doubt he destroys, to a certain extent, the reputation which Sheridan sedulously sought to gain, that of an indolent and careless wit. But not altogether, for we are told that the last five scenes were dashed off on one rough draft, and they are not markedly inferior to the rest of the play. Sheridan, in fact, combined the methods—

> "Of hasty Shadwell and slow Wycherley."

If taken at a disadvantage he was equal to the occasion, but as a rule he was never satisfied until he had spent himself in his efforts to secure perfection. Even so he was barely content. When Ridgway, to whom Sheridan had sold the copyright of the comedy, made repeated demands for the manuscript, the dramatist told him that he had been for nineteen years endeavouring to satisfy himself with the style of "The School for Scandal," but had not yet succeeded. All the more credit to him for his capacity for taking pains, for it is thus that masterpieces are made. Sheridan wrote and rewrote "The School for Scandal" just as Flaubert wrote and rewrote "Madame Bovary," and yet neither work as we have it shows much sign of the chisel. But the process by which the quarrels between Sir Peter and Lady Teazle, and the scene between Lady Teazle and Joseph Surface, were converted from indifferent imitations of Vanbrugh to excellent specimens of Sheridanese, is one of extreme interest. We learn, too, from Miss Lefanu that it was prefaced by a considerable period of "sitting and thinking." "The comedy is finished," said Sheridan; "I have now nothing to do but to write it." But even the writing was not accomplished without much experimentalizing, condensation, and refinement.

Even in its most finished state, Sheridan's art is limited, and by its limitations causes him to rank in the second not the first class of dramatists; he is a wit, but not a poet. When Hazlitt calls "The School for Scandal" the most finished and faultless comedy we have, he is surely thinking of the post-Restoration comedy. Finished it is, but hardly faultless. It would be absurd to compare the play with "As You Like It," or even with "Every Man in his Humour." Horace Walpole is quite right when he says that it is deficient in nature and truth of character. Compared with Volpone, Joseph Surface is a very crude sort of hypocrite, drawn in plain black and white, and without any nice gradations of villainy. He whips off his mask and claps it on again with the distracting abruptness of a Harlequin; the fluency of his "sentiments" in the presence of Sir Peter, and the exuberance of his cynicism when plotting with Lady Sneerwell, are alike overdone. In short, Sheridan's comedy is artificial, not natural, and the touchstone of his excellence is not life, but manners. What Hazlitt has said of Congreve in his essay on the four Restoration dramatists holds equally true of his disciple and successor; and his description of the Millamant of "Love for Love" fits Lady Teazle, with certain reservations, to a T. Congreve, contends the prince of dramatic critics,

> "has given us the finest idea of an artificial character of this kind; but it is still the reflection of an artificial character. The springs of nature, passion, or imagination are but faintly touched. The impressions appealed to, and with masterly address, are habitual, external, and conventional advantages: the ideas of birth, of fortune, of connections, of dress, accomplishment, fashion, the opinion of the world, of crowds of admirers, continually come into play, flatter our vanity, bribe our interest, fall in with our prejudices—it is these that support the goddess of our idolatry, with which she is everything, and without which she is nothing. The mere fine lady of comedy, compared with the heroine of romance or poetry, when stripped of her adventitious ornaments and advantages, is too much like the doll stripped of its finery. In thinking of Millamant we think almost as much of her dress as of her person; it is not so with Rosalind or Perdita. The poet has painted them differently; in colours which 'nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on,' with health, with innocence, with gaiety, 'wild wit, invention ever new;' with pure red and white, like the wilding's blossoms; with warbled wood-notes, like the feathered choirs; with thoughts fluttering on the wings of imagination, and hearts panting and breathless with eager delight. The interest we feel is in themselves; the admiration they excite is for themselves. They do not depend upon the drapery of circumstances. It is nature that 'blazons herself' in them. Imogen is the same in a lonely cave as in a court; nay

more, for she there seems something heavenly—a spirit or a vision; and, as it were, shames her destiny, brighter for the foil of circumstances. Millamant is nothing but a fine lady; and all her airs and affectation would be blown away with the first breath of misfortune. Enviable in drawing-rooms, adorable at her toilette, fashion, like a witch, has thrown her spell about her; but if that spell were broken, her power of fascination would be gone. For that reason I think the character better adapted for the stage: it is more artificial, more theatrical, more meritricious. I would rather have seen Mrs. Abington's Millamant than any Rosalind that ever appeared on the stage. Somehow, this sort of acquired elegance is more a thing of costume, of air and manner; and in comedy, or on the comic stage, the light and familiar, the trifling, superficial, and agreeable, bears, perhaps, rightful sway over that which touches the affections or exhausts the fancy."

The quotation is somewhat long, but scissors and paste may be excused where Hazlitt is concerned. Besides the extract helps us to formulate the true answer to the charge so often brought against Sheridan, that his characters are too witty, and that their wit is the same. It is best met by a plea of guilty, combined with the assertion that the offence committed is not a crime but a virtue. From the artistic point of view it is no doubt a blunder to make Trip talk like his master, and it is inconceivable that a simple, common-place old gentleman like Sir Peter could utter the recondite witticism—"In all cases of slander currency, whenever the drawer of the lie was not to be found, the injured parties should have a right to come down on any of the indorsers." So, too, it is difficult to imagine a mere fribble, like Sir Benjamin Backbite, the perpetrator of the excellent jest about the widow Ochre. "Come, come, 'tis not that she paints so ill—but when she has finished her face, she joins it on so badly to her neck, that she looks like a mended statue, in which the connoisseur may see at once that the head is modern, though the trunk's antique." But when dramatic effect alone is aimed at, the more wit there is to be found in the dialogue the better. The object of comedy is amusement and delight, the more its audience smile the greater its success. It is impossible to imagine a greater intellectual treat, nor one, alas, more unlikely of realization, than would be the performance of "Love for Love" with an adequate interpretation, and "The School for Scandal" is not unworthy to be ranked with "Love for Love;" for its wit, if more laboured, is at the same time more surprising. Most of it is Sheridan's own, but we catch, too, something of the tones which prevailed in that by-gone age, when Brookes's hung on the lips of Fitzpatrick, George Selwyn, and Hare, and when Reynolds immortalized the beauty of rank with—

> "That art, which well might added lustre give
> To Nature's best, and Heaven's superlative:
> On Granby's cheek might bid new glories rise,
> Or point a purer beam from Devon's eyes."[1]

When Horace Walpole complained that "The School for Scandal" was too long, he allowed that he was badly posted for hearing, and the admission accounts for the censure. Enthusiasm is apt to flag when half the sentences of a dialogue are lost. But modern audiences are by no means inclined to yawn over the last act of the play, containing, as it does, the final appearance of Lady Sneerwell and her associates. When, however, he complained that several of the scenes were unnecessary, he certainly hit upon what has been considered a defect in the comedy. It is pretty certain that he alludes to the scandal-scenes proper, and they are but loosely connected, if at all, with the main plot. "I wish," said a first-nighter in the pit during the scene at Lady Sneerwell's, "that these people would have done talking and let the play begin." As Moore has pointed out, the peculiarity is due to the fact that the play is a combination of two distinct plots, one dealing with the Teazles, the other with Lady Sneerwell and Sir Benjamin Backbite as the principal personages, and not even Sheridan's art could effect a perfect blend. But, after all, a certain amount of digression is surely permissible in comedy, where the characters are not, as in tragedy, hurried towards their doom under the compulsion of a relentless destiny. "Plot stood still!" exclaims Bayes in the Duke of Buckingham's "Rehearsal," "what a devil is a plot good for but to bring in fine things!" That is an extreme view, no doubt, but when the way is pleasant it is not culpable to loiter, especially in the company of Sir Benjamin, Crabtree, and Mrs. Candour. If the plot is to be everything, and all accessories and ornamentations are to be ruthlessly debarred, the art of the playwright is lowered at once to the mere ingenuity of the mechanician. But apart from the scandal-scenes the play possesses a very interesting and well-developed plot leading up to the screen-scene, which is flawless. Hypercriticism has urged that the hiding of Lady Teazle behind the screen exposes her to the view of the maiden lady across the way to foil whose prying eyes Joseph Surface had placed the screen before the window. But, as Mr. Brander Matthews has remarked, Lady Teazle rushes behind it in her terror without consulting Joseph, and so the objection falls to the ground.

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[1] A Portrait, addressed to Mrs. Crewe; with the comedy of "The School for Scandal," by R. B. Sheridan, Esq.

Is "The School for Scandal" moral, or immoral, or non-moral? Hazlitt, in his Lecture, comments on the moral value of the play, which, he says, "as often as it is acted, must serve to clear the air of that low, creeping fog of cant and mysticism, which threatens to confound every native impulse or honest conviction in the nauseous belief of a perpetual lie, and in the laudable profession of systematic hypocrisy." But, with all due respect to so admirable a critic, any attempt to extract a sermon from "The School for Scandal" is beside the point. The play is, as has been said already of "The Rivals," purely non-moral, except for its occasional and rather incongruous conformity with the canons of genteel comedy. It appeals to what Charles Lamb called the "middle emotions." The audience can, if they like, think that a solid victory has been won by virtue, when the hypocrisy of Joseph Surface has been exposed, and the scandalous college has been turned out by Sir Peter Teazle, but they are quite mistaken. Garrick was, in his generation, wiser than they, when he wrote in his prologue—

> "Is our young bard so young, to think that he
> Can stop the full spring-tide of calumny?

> Knows he the world so little, and his trade?
> Alas! the devil's sooner raised than laid;
> So strong, so swift, the monster there's no gagging:
> Cut Scandal's head off, still the tongue is wagging."

Sheridan would have answered that the devil did not come into his *scenario*, and that he appealed to the intellects not the consciences of his audience. He meant them to admire the wit of his dialogue, and appreciate the ingenuity of his plot, not to bother their heads because a full measure of poetic justice does not overtake Lady Sneerwell, and Joseph Surface does not expiate his crimes in Newgate. Both characters are purely artificial, not meant to be taken seriously, and as such they were played by the actors who learnt their parts under Sheridan's instruction.[1] Even in Charles Lamb's time the spirit of true criticism was beginning to desert theatre-goers, and he doubted if they would have endured Palmer's habit of addressing his sentiments as much to you as to Sir Peter, and King's method of playing off his "teasings" upon his audience. From the advent of the frock-coat the comic Muse had fled, and people insisted upon a realistic Joseph, with whom they could work themselves up into a fitting state of virtuous indignation. At best, as Lamb has pointed out, the character is full of incongruities, caused by Sheridan's concessions to sentimental comedy, and is one that requires to be played lightly and with discretion, notably in the scene with Sir Oliver, disguised as Old Stanley. The modern Joseph Surface, stalking solemnly about the stage, is an altogether tiresome person, who appears to have strayed from some transpontine melodrama into the wrong theatre, and to be oppressed by the fact without having the courage to take himself off. He never rises to the full sense of the dignity of his mission as a reformer of morals, nor, considering that he has to pose as the devil's advocate, is his failure altogether surprising. Besides, it is difficult to throw intensity into a character, who, when he has been hopelessly found out, contents himself with the complacent remark—"Sure Fortune never played a man of my policy such a trick before. My character with Sir Peter, my hopes with Maria, destroyed in a moment! I'm in a rare humour to listen to other people's distresses! I sha'n't be able to bestow even a benevolent sentiment on Old Stanley." Where is the remorse, the gnawing of conscience which, in the interests of morality, Joseph Surface should have displayed?

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[1] Sheridan, however, was dissatisfied with all his Sir Peters, from King to the elder Mathews. They were unable, says Mrs. Mathews, in her memoirs of her husband, to follow his reading of the character.

Nor can the moral test be applied with any more propriety to the characters which, for want of a better word, must be called sympathetic—Charles Surface, Sir Peter and Lady Teazle. All the *dramatis personæ* are really sympathetic or unsympathetic, just as you choose to take them, that is to say, they are untrammelled by the domestic affections. Moore was at pains to defend Sheridan from the charge of having damaged the interests of honesty and virtue by the gay charm which he has thrown round the irregularities of Charles Surface.

He does so by quoting Burke's famous phrase, that "vice loses half its evil by losing all its grossness," and exalts Charles at the expense of the rakes of Congreve and Farquhar. But the volatile and spendthrift hero of "The School for Scandal," despite his regard for his absent uncle and his generosity towards Old Stanley, is not conceived with any more serious purport than the Roebuck of Farquhar's "Love and a Bottle." The contrast between his open-handed recklessness and the the sentimental hypocrisy of Joseph is an effective stage-contrast, and nothing more, and is to be judged neither by copybook texts nor the Duty towards my Neighbours. It is stage-virtue which triumphs and stage-vice which is defeated, but though we are glad that all ends happily, there is no "Go thou and do likewise" in the matter at all. It is the fashion to talk about the elevating influence of the stage and its capacity for handling social problems, yet there is not much profit to be derived from plays professing to deal with problems social or moral, nor anything but weariness and nausea from a medical blue-book of the Ibsen class. But to read or hear a good comedy, such as Sheridan's masterpiece, is, to use Hazlitt's phrase, "to keep the best company in the world, where the best things are said, and the most amusing happen." It is not life, but a relief from life with its appointments, its work, and its butchers' bills. If we became acquainted with Lady Teazle in society we should be outraged by the brutality of her desire to become a widow, and when we discovered that she had voluntarily returned to Joseph Surface's house, in which she had been a few hours previously on the brink of transgression, we should look upon her as a brazen baggage. But on the stage these incongruities only appear in a half light, and she remains a purely delightful and irresponsible creature. Similarly, it is possible to feel a sense of genuine satisfaction, when Sir Peter escapes cuckoldry, without caring whether his indignation is at all adequate to the occasion. From the moralist's point of view a husband who in a similar situation thinks only of the ridicule which will fall upon himself is a somewhat contemptible person; and Sir Peter's reconciliation with his wife would be set down as dictated by uxoriousness rather than magnimity. But somehow it is impossible to conceive Sir Peter Teazle as other than a thoroughly estimable and simple-minded old gentleman. In real life how terrible must have been his discomfiture on the fall of the screen, and how heartless would the speech of Charles have sounded. The scene is frequently acted as if it were tragedy, and then it becomes simply absurd. Garrick saw that any expression of genuine emotion would ruin it at once.

> "A gentleman," he wrote to Sheridan on the 12th of May, "who is as mad as myself about y^e School remarked, that the characters upon the stage at y^e falling of the screen stand too long before they speak. I thought so too y^e first night—tho' they should be astonish'd and a little petrify'd, yet it may be carry'd to too great a length."

Off the stage a good deal of astonishment would surely have been legitimate on such an occasion, but Garrick knew, what many of Sheridan's critics have not known, that comedy has laws of its own. Its merit may not be in proportion to its unreality, but it can have little merit if it be real, for the average incidents and the average conversations of life are but poor comedy.

It remains to deal with the charges of plagiarism which have been brought against this, as against the other plays of Sheridan. On the whole, they may be said at once to amount to a hint borrowed from one source and another, and to nothing more. And though plagiarism is not, as Ben Jonson contended, meritorious in itself, Sheridan at least could claim that nearly everything he appropriated from others was improved by the process. Dr. Watkins, indeed, in his scissors-and-paste biography of Sheridan, was good enough to hint that "The School for Scandal" was not Sheridan's at all, but the work either of Mrs. Sheridan or of an anonymous young lady, who died of consumption at Bristol Hot-wells. Moore, whether advisedly or no, destroyed this comically [illegible] myth by printing extract after extract from Sheridan's rough drafts, demonstrating thereby the intellectual labour by which the comedy was built up. Sheridan himself, it may be noted, never condescended to meet this and similar accusations except by a little genial banter in "The Critic."

"*Dangle.* Sir Fretful, have you sent your play to the managers yet? or can I be of any service to you?

"*Sir Fretful.* No, no, I thank you; I believe the piece had sufficient recommendation with it. I thank you though. I sent it to the manager of COVENT GARDEN THEATRE this morning.

"*Sneer.* I should have thought now that it might have been cast (as the actors call it) better at DRURY LANE.

"*Sir Fretful.* O, lud, no!—never send a play there while I live. Hark'ee! (*whispers Sneer.*)

"*Sneer.* Writes himself! I know he does!

> "*Sir Fretful.* I say nothing. I take away from no man's merit. Am hurt at no man's good fortune. I say nothing. But this I will say, through all my knowledge of life, I have discovered that there is not a passion so strongly rooted in the human breast as envy.
>
> "*Sneer.* I believe you have reason for what you say, indeed.
>
> "*Sir Fretful.* Besides, I can tell you it is not always so safe to leave a play in the hands of those who write themselves.
>
> "*Sneer.* What! they may steal from them, hey, my dear Plagiary?
>
> "*Sir Fretful.* Steal! to be sure they may, and egad! serve your best thoughts as gipsies do stolen children, disfigure them to make 'em pass for their own.
>
> "*Sneer.* But your present work is a sacrifice to Melpomene, and HE you know never——
>
> "*Sir Fretful.* That's no security—a dexterous plagiarist may do anything. Why, Sir, for aught I know, he might take out some of the best things in my tragedy and put them into his own comedy."

This was answer enough; and as to the actual genesis of "The School for Scandal," we are informed by Miss Lefanu that Sheridan conceived the idea of dealing with the subject on perusing the wild legends current in the Bath papers after his second duel with Captain Mathews. The statement is borne out by Moore's evidence that the scandalous college was, in the first sketch of the play, established in the Pump Room at Bath, and Crabtree may after all have been drawing upon the imagination of some journalist, not his own, when he described how—

> "Charles' shot took effect, as I tell you, and Sir Peter's missed; but, what is very extraordinary, the ball struck against a little bronze Shakespeare that stood over the fire-place, grazed out of the window at a right angle, and wounded the postman, who was just coming to the door with a double letter from Northamptonshire."

But scandal, like most of the other failings of mankind, had already been made the subject of satire, and Sheridan was not above taking a hint from his predecessors in his management of the theme. We can trace the scandal-scenes properly so-called of "The School" through three generations. The first is the scene in the "Misanthrope" of Molière, where Célimène discusses her acquaintance. Then we have a short scene in Wycherley's "Plain Dealer" (act ii. scene 1), in which Novel and Olivia talk over the people with whom Novel had been dining. From the latter play Sheridan seems to have borrowed one or two suggestions: for instance, Joseph Surface's ironical compliment to Mrs. Candour on her forbearance and good nature, and Lady Sneerwell's description of Mrs. Evergreen. To Congreve's "Double-Dealer" (act iii. scene 10), Sheridan was even more indebted, and it can hardly be said that his wit materially improves that of the original. Indeed, Sir Benjamin Backbite's verse must be pronounced inferior in drollery to Lady Froth's admirable effusion:—

"For as the sun shines every day,
So of our coachman I may say,
He shows his drunken fiery face
Just as the sun does more or less."

Again, the comments of Lady Sneerwell, Mrs. Candour, and Sir Benjamin upon their absent friends, though more elaborate than those of Lady Froth and Brisk, are not, *pace* Moore, a whit more pointed. And Sheridan has lessened the dramatic effect of the whole scene, as Mr. Gosse, in his monograph on Congreve has pointed out, by making Lady Teazle join in the destruction of reputations, instead of imitating Cynthia in her expression of disgust at the whole proceeding. Nor do the two scandal-scenes exhaust the points of resemblance between "The School for Scandal" and "The Double-Dealer." Joseph Surface's relations with Lady Teazle and Maria are very similar to those between Maskwell, Lady Touchwood, and Cynthia, though Congreve provides an additional complication by making Lady Touchwood in love with Mellefont, the Charles Surface of the piece, who it may be noted has a friend called Careless. Lady Touchwood, in fact, combines the functions of Lady Teazle and Lady Sneerwell. But it is pretty certain that the resemblance is accidental, since we know that "The School for Scandal," as we have it, is an amalgamation of two distinct plots, conceived independently, and therefore not derived from a common source. All that can be said is, that when Sheridan decided on joining his plots together he may possibly have seen that the characters lent themselves to a *dénouement* something similar to Congreve's. If so, the origin of the screen-scene is to be discovered, not, as the over-ingenious Boaden suggested, in the exposure of Square though the fall of a rug in Molly Seagrim's bedroom, but in the elaborate intrigue in the fourth and fifth acts of "The Double-Dealer," which brings Maskwell, Mellefont, Lord and Lady Touchwood together in Lady Touchwood's chamber, with the result that Lord Touchwood's eyes are opened to the villainy of Maskwell.

The remainder of Sheridan's indebtedness may be briefly dismissed. It has been said that Charles and

Joseph Surface are copied from Fielding's Tom Jones and Blifil, and Joseph Surface has also been traced to Molière and to the Malvil of Arthur Murphy's "Know your own Mind." It was quite possible that the contrast between Charles and Joseph may have been immediately suggested to Sheridan by Fielding; but it is old enough in all conscience, and if Sheridan did not go to sleep in church he must frequently have heard the story of Esau and Jacob. Strange it is that Sheridan's critics should have failed to see that the very fact that Joseph Surface can be traced to so many sources proves that he can owe very little to any of them. A play must have a bad man in it, otherwise it becomes insipid and undramatic, and assassins being out of place in comedy, hypocrites are almost indispensable. Tartuffe and Joseph Surface are both hypocrites, but there the resemblance ends. As to the Malvil theory, which has the authority of Hazlitt, it is more tenable. But all that can safely be asserted is that Sheridan may have seen the play—it was produced at Covent Garden on February 22, 1777—while he was writing "The School for Scandal." From a solitary sentence uttered by Malvil, "To a person of sentiment like you, madam, a visit is paid with pleasure," Sheridan may have conceived the idea of making Joseph Surface a sententious hypocrite, but otherwise the two characters have nothing in common beyond being hypocrites. Old Sheridan once made a remark which, though it was given an uncomplimentary turn, probably contained a good deal of truth. "Talk of the merit of Dick's comedy," said he, "there's nothing in it. He had but to dip the pencil in his own heart, and he'd find there the characters both of Joseph and Charles" — that is, his father, in his most censorious mood, thought them original creations.

Again, it is quite possible that Sheridan may, as Boaden suggested, have borrowed from his mother's novel, "Miss Sidney Biddulph," the incident of the arrival of Sir Oliver from India, and his visit to his relations in disguise. The loan is a trivial one, hardly more considerable than the name of Surface which was taken from her comedy, "A Trip to Bath." So, too, the idea of "little Premium" may have been taken from the "little Transfer the broker," of Foote's "Minor," and Rowley is neither the first nor the last of the faithful stewards who have trod the stage of comedy. None of these appropriations matters in the least when compared with the manner in which it is used; and none is incompatible with a due respect to tradition. If plagiarism is made the sole test of literary merit, we may well exclaim with the Scotchman in the pit at the first representation of Home's "Douglas," "Whar's Wullie Shakespeare noo?" But a lack of originality in minor details is as dust in the balance, if the treatment and style of the whole be excellent. They are the only true touchstones, and it is by them "The School for Scandal" must be judged. If they are applied, "The School for Scandal," even when placed by the side of "Love for Love," or "The Way of the World," must be pronounced a great comedy, with an adequate plot, several perfect scenes, and a dialogue of consummate brilliance and polish. As literature it may not be equal to Congreve, but as acted drama it is far superior.

CHAPTER V.

IN spite of the complete triumph of "The School for Scandal," there seems to have been still a good deal of uncertainty about the fortunes of Drury Lane. Garrick was at first sanguine. "This is but a single play," observed a critic, "and in the long run will be but a slender help to support the theatre. To you, Mr. Garrick, I must say the Atlas that propped the stage has left his station." "Has he?" said Garrick; "if that be the case he has found another Hercules to succeed him." But soon afterwards, on July 13, 1777, we find him writing to King: "Poor old Drury! it will, I fear, very soon be in the hand of the Philistines." And Mrs. Clive, though long retired from the stage, was evidently well posted in theatrical news, for she wrote to the great actor in the following year: "Everybody is raving against Mr. Sheridan for his supineness; there never was such a contrast as between Garrick and Sheridan; what have you given him that he creeps so?" To make matters worse, old Sheridan, whom in an evil hour his son had appointed stage manager, by way of sealing their long-delayed reconciliation, contrived, through his ridiculous self-importance, to pick a quarrel with Garrick, who wrote indignantly:—

> "Pray assure your father that I meant not to interfere in his department. I imagined (foolishly indeed) my attending Bannister's rehearsal of the part I once played, and which your father never saw [Zaphna], might have assisted the cause without giving the least offence. I love my ease too well to be thought an interloper, and I should not have been impertinent enough to have attended any rehearsal had not you, Sir, in a very particular manner, desired me. However, upon no consideration will I ever interfere again in this business, nor be liable to receive such another message as was brought to me this evening by young Bannister."

The letter is undated, but it was probably written in October, 1778,[1] and on January 20, 1779, David Garrick died. Sheridan was chief mourner at his funeral, and wrote a monody to his memory, which was recited by Mrs. Yates on the 2nd of March, at Drury Lane. It is Sheridan's longest essay in poetry, and certainly his least successful. The metre is correct, and there is a fine line or two, but the whole is monotonous. In fact, the heroic couplet taken seriously was beyond Sheridan. Again, in his treatment of the subject there is much to be desired. Sheridan used to declare that he had never seen Garrick act, and the statement was probably put forward as an excuse for the fact that there is not an attempt throughout the poem to recall the peculiar genius of the great comedian, whom most of those present must have remembered so well. Instead, they had to put up with elaborate commonplaces on the fugitive nature of the actor's art and fame, a thought which, as Moore well remarks, had already been more simply expressed by Garrick himself in his prologue to "The Clandestine Marriage." The best passage in the poem owed its inspiration to a saying of Burke's over the grave, which in Sheridan's hands became—

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[1] The play was called "Mahomet," and it was produced on October 11th.

> "The throng that mourn'd as their dead favourite pass'd,
> The grac'd respect that claim'd him to the last;
> *While Shakespeare's image, from its hallow'd base,*
> *Seem'd to prescribe the grave, and point the place.*"

During all these months Sheridan's pen lay idle. The public chose indeed to attribute to him an indifferent trifle called "The Camp," which was produced in October, 1778. But it was really by his friend Tickell, and Sheridan, out of sheer good nature, allowed the rumour to go uncontradicted. Many people besides Mrs. Clive were probably angry with him for his indolence, but "The School for Scandal" continued to draw good houses, and the company having been strengthened by the accession of Henderson, who was seen at his best in tragedy, Shakespearian revivals were of frequent occurrence. Sheridan, then, had more than one excuse for resting on his oars, and of them he was, in all probability, only too glad to avail himself. At length he resumed his activity, and set to work on "The Critic," his last genuine play, which was brought out on October 30, 1779. Though the farce was evidently written with the utmost care, Sheridan as usual could not be induced to finish it until the last moment. Two days before it was announced, the final scene had not been written, but the combined intelligences of Linley and King were equal to the occasion. Linley decoyed Sheridan down to the theatre, and King locked him into the green-room, with the prompter's unfinished copy of "The Critic," writing materials, two bottles of claret, and a dish of anchovy sandwiches. He was told that he was to finish the wine and the farce, but was to consider himself a prisoner until they were both at an end. Sheridan laughed and obeyed.

According to a familiar story, "The Critic" was written to repay Cumberland for his conduct on the first night of "The School for Scandal." It was said that the captious author took his children to the play, and when they screamed with delight he pinched them, exclaiming, "What are you laughing at, my dear little folks? You should not laugh, my angels, there is nothing to laugh at!" and then in an undertone, "Keep still, you little dunces!" When Sheridan was told of this, he is reported to have said, "Devilish ungrateful that, for I sat out his tragedy last week, and laughed from beginning to end." The anecdote is good, but unfortunately it will not bear investigation. Cumberland's first tragedy, "The Battle of Hastings," was not produced until 1778, the year after "The School for Scandal," and in his Memoirs he denies the whole story, declaring that he was at Bath at the time, and that he did not see the play at all during its first run. There can be no doubt, however, that Sir Fretful Plagiary was intended for Cumberland, and many passages in his Memoirs attest the accuracy of the portrait. So too Dangle, who is concisely described by Mrs. Dangle as "a mock Mæcenas to second-hand authors," is said to have been a caricature of one

Vaughan. If this is the "Hat" Vaughan who befriended Sheridan during his last days, he took a very noble revenge.

As a matter of fact the travesty of a rehearsal, the subject of "The Critic," was new neither to Sheridan nor to the stage, and Sir Fretful Plagiary and Dangle were evidently afterthoughts. We have seen that a burlesque called "Jupiter," written in conjunction with Halhed, was one of his earliest dramatic efforts, and Moore tells us that the form of a rehearsal into which the whole was thrown, was suggested and arranged entirely by Sheridan. The character of Simile in the boyish attempt is clearly a rough draft of our friend Puff. Besides, the reproduction and improvement of old material is entirely characteristic of Sheridan. He even adapted, and inserted in his pieces, the love-poems addressed to his wife. But if Sheridan reproduced in "The Critic" a plan which had been already attempted by himself, he also reproduced a plan which had been attempted many times by earlier dramatic authors, since Fletcher had set the fashion by his "Knight of the Burning Pestle." By far the most successful of these efforts was the Duke of Buckingham's "The Rehearsal," written to ridicule Dryden under the character of Bayes. Latterly Fielding had tried the same scheme in a variety of plays, of which "Pasquin" was the most meritorious. Sheridan could, then, hardly lay claim to originality of design; but it is absurd to dismiss "The Critic," as did Horace Walpole, with the remark that it was "wondrously old and flat; a poor imitation."

For here, again, the charges of plagiarism brought against Sheridan are very inconclusive; the model was old, but the treatment was almost entirely his own. A phrase or two exhausts his indebtedness to Fielding, and his borrowings from the Duke of Buckingham are hardly more considerable. They are confined to the play rehearsed, "The Spanish Armada," and the only loans that are at all obvious are Mr. Puff's announcement of his grand scene, "Now then for my magnificence, my battle, my noise, and my procession!" and the opening words of Sir Christopher Hatton, "True, gallant Raleigh," with Dangle's query, "What, they had been talking before?" and Puff's reply, "Oh, yes; all the way as they came along." Otherwise Bayes has little in common with Puff, beyond being a dramatic author, and he resembles Sir Fretful Plagiary only in keeping a commonplace book, into which he conveys other people's ideas. But so it is to be presumed do most plagiarists. And, Sheridan, as always, improved upon his predecessors. Not that "The Rehearsal" does not contain many excellent points. In particular, the eclipse formed by a dance in which three actors representing the sun, moon, and earth, change places, is quite as good as, if not better than, Sheridan's Thames with his two banks on one side. But, as a whole, it is diffuse and too evidently written to satisfy the spleen of the moment by ridiculing Dryden's personal peculiarities. Sheridan's Dangle, Sir Fretful Plagiary, and Puff, on the other hand, are types which even at this distance of time have not lost their vitality, though two, if not the third, were intended to satirise individuals. The first act in which Mr. Puff developes the art of puffing, contains some of Sheridan's very best comedy.

Fanny Burney, when she read it, decided that it was "as full of wit, satire, and spirit, as of lines." It is never acted now except in a mangled form. But one can well imagine how the audiences of 1779 must have enjoyed King's clear delivery of the description of the "puff direct," especially when he gave vent to an eloquent panegyric on Dodd (Dangle), Palmer (Sneer), and himself:—

"Mr. Dodd was astonishingly great in the character of Sir Harry. That universal and judicious actor, Mr. Palmer, perhaps never appeared to more advantage than in the colonel; but it is not in the power of language to do justice to Mr. King: indeed, he more than merited those frequent bursts of applause which he drew from a most brilliant and judicious audience."

Incidentally, too, the first act of "The Critic" is important as containing Sheridan's valedictory remarks on sentimental comedy, which he had killed by the success of his own plays. They are rather severe.

"*Dangle* [reading]. *Bursts into tears and exit.* What is this; a tragedy?

"*Sneer.* No, that's a genteel comedy, not a translation—only taken from the French; it is written in a style which they have lately tried to run down; the true sentimental, and nothing ridiculous from the beginning to the end.

"*Mrs. Dangle.* Well, if they had kept to that, I should not have been such an enemy to the stage; there is some edification to be got out of those pieces, Mr. Sneer.

"*Sneer.* I am quite of your opinion, Mrs. Dangle: the theatre, in proper hands, might certainly be made the school of morality; but now, I am sorry to say it, people seem to go there principally for their entertainment!"

If the comedy of the first act of "The Critic" has stood the wear and tear of time, so has the satire of the second act. The particular plays at which it was aimed, such as Home's "Fatal Discovery," have long since become obsolete, and have had but few successors. For "The Critic" killed bombastic tragedy much as "The School for Scandal" killed sentimental comedy. "Zorayda," which was brought out immediately afterwards, was withdrawn after a run of eight nights, as its heroine was found to have been forestalled by Tilburnia. But "The Spanish Armada" is a burlesque of bad plays in general, quite as much as bad tragedies individually. So long as convention rules the drama, conversations will be overheard under the most improbable circumstances, under-plots will continue to have but little connection with main-plots, and heroines will go mad, though no longer in white satin. And until all sense of humour has been eliminated from English life, people will quote and laugh at "No scandal about Queen Elizabeth, I hope," "The Spanish fleet thou can'st not see—because It is not yet in sight," and "Where they do agree upon the stage, their unanimity is wonderful."

With "The Critic," Sheridan's literary and dramatic productions came, practically speaking, to an end. He was still ready to help an acquaintance, for instance, by writing the lively epilogue to Hannah More's play, "The Fatal Falsehood," and the prologue to Lady Craven's "Miniature Picture," which was eventually transferred to "Pizarro." But even so far as poetry was concerned, he was content to shine in ladies' albums, and the fragments which Moore found among his papers were unimportant. Shortly after his death there appeared under his name an "Ode to Scandal," which, if it be really his, is as good as any verse he ever wrote.[1] It has been included as Sheridan's in more than one poetical anthology. But its genuineness appears to be quite an open question. Moore never so much as mentions it, though he must have known of its existence, and though in writing Sheridan's life he was, as may be seen in his diary, often at a loss for materials. Again it was sent anonymously to the publisher, Wright, of Fleet Street, accompanied by a letter of Sheridan's which, as it is not given by Wright, evidently had nothing to do with the Ode. Wright says, indeed, in his advertisement to the public, that he was sure of the quarter whence the Ode came; but was he likely to have been particularly scrupulous, when the supposed author could no longer bring him to book? Internal evidence also points to the conclusion that the Ode is not Sheridan's. The metre is far more elaborate than any he was accustomed to use, and the poem, so far from being as the publisher impudently suggested, the origin of "The School for Scandal," does not contain a single anticipation of that play. Possibly the Ode, like a good deal of pseudo-Sheridan work, may have been Tickell's.

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[1] As the "Ode to Scandal" has been seldom republished, an extract from it may be given here:

"The first informations
Of lost reputations
As offerings to thee I'll consign;
And the earliest news
Of surprised billet-doux
Shall constant be served at thy shrine.
Intrigues by the score
Never heard of before
Shall the sacrifice daily augment,
And by each *Morning Post*
Some favourite toast
A victim to thee shall be sent."

Sheridan's subsequent contributions to the drama were not of much greater consequence. He applied the pruning-knife, as we shall see, to "The Stranger," and adapted the adaptation of "Pizarro." He even sketched out the plot of "The Glorious First of June," and of two spectacular pieces, the "Forty Thieves" and the pantomime, "Robinson Crusoe," in the last of which pieces of pot-boiling he was accused by the clown Delpini of having stolen from him the joke of pulling off a man's leg together with his boot. But from dramatic authorship of a more elevated character he instinctively recoiled. No doubt his time was much taken up by politics, society, and the routine of management. But it is clear also that he recognized that in "The School for Scandal" he had reached his zenith, and feared the risk of a temporary failure, perhaps of a gradual decline. Two unfinished plays, or sketches of plays, were found among his papers by Moore. The first in its original form was a musical drama, without a name, but evidently founded on "The Goblings" of Sir John Suckling, since its chief personages were a band of outlaws in the guise of Devils. It was left very incomplete, and all that can be said of it is that it was apparently written subsequently to his residence at Bath. From this unnamed play was evolved an opera-book, called "The Foresters." Of this piece Moore could only discover a fragment or two, but the anonymous Octogenarian who subsequently published some loose memoirs of Sheridan, declared that at least two acts were finished, and that the piece was undertaken just after his second marriage, that is, in 1795. Far more to be regretted is his abandonment of his projected comedy of "Affectation," which never progressed beyond a few sketches of character, many embryo jokes, and the christening of three of the intended personages—Sir Babble Bore, Sir Peregrine Paradox, and Feignwit. Evidently he failed to hit upon an interesting plot in which to set the characters, and though Sir Peter Teazle's opinion of them would have been worth listening to, Sheridan had the example of Vanbrugh's comparative failure in "Sir Henry Wildair," to warn him against a sequel to "The School for Scandal." He certainly wished it to be believed that he was hard at work on both plays. "Wait," he used to say, smilingly, "until you have seen my 'Foresters;'" and from time to time the "puff preliminary" appeared in the papers, announcing the approaching completion both of "The Foresters" and of "Affectation." But those who knew him well never believed that either play would ever see the light. Michael Kelly said to him one day, "You will never write again; you are afraid to write." Sheridan fixed his penetrating eye on Kelly, and asked, "Of whom am I afraid?" Kelly retorted, "You are afraid of the author of 'The School for Scandal.'" If Kelly really made the remark, and did not merely improve in his Reminiscences upon a similar saying of Garrick's, it was very clever of him.

CHAPTER VI.

AT the close of 1779 Sheridan commanded a source of income which, fluctuating though it might be, must have seemed to a person of his sanguine disposition well-nigh inexhaustible. Now was the time for realizing what had probably been from the first the main object of his ambition—a reputation as a statesman. It is clear that all along he intended literary fame to be merely a stepping-stone to political renown. The stage of the House of Commons appealed to a larger audience than that of Drury Lane, and he hoped, no doubt, to supplement the revenue derived from the theatre by the salary of office. It was an age of political adventurers, most of them, remarkably enough, of Anglo-Irish parentage. Burke had preceded Sheridan, Tierney and Canning were to follow him. They, one and all, won their way to great positions, but about all of them there hung the suspicion that a man who makes politics a trade, is to be used rather than trusted. Sheridan, in particular, never attained a status higher than the second rank, though his capacities were of the highest. Indeed his opportunities of ministerial distinction of any sort were remarkably few, since he was condemned to serve under a leader whose blundering tactics condemned the Whig party to year after year of opposition. It was not very long before Mrs. Sheridan, at any rate, discovered that the pursuit of politics was having a disastrous effect upon her husband's circumstances. "I am more than ever convinced," she wrote to him in 1790, "we must look to other resources for wealth and independence, and consider politics merely as an amusement." The theatre suffered from the scanty time that Sheridan was able to bestow upon it, and the chance of Fox's return to power became more and more remote. But when Sheridan resolved on embracing a political career the prospects of the Whigs were far rosier. Lord North's star was obviously setting, Pitt's had not yet risen, and the Opposition were confident of a speedy return to office. Everything combined to urge him to lay down his pen, and mount the hustings.

Youth is generally in antagonism to the powers that be. Besides, Sheridan's political friendships were chiefly among the assailants of Lord North's ministry. He had formed the acquaintance of Mr. Windham at Bath; he met Burke at the Turk's Head Club, and the intimacy was continued at the Literary Club. To Fox he was introduced by Lord John Townshend, and a mutual admiration ensued. It would be interesting if we could fix the date of the acquaintances. But it is impossible to do so with exactitude. So far back as August, 1777, we find Lord Camden writing to Garrick that Fox had marked Sheridan down as the first genius of his time. Fox must presumably have arrived at the conclusion after their first interview, from which he rose with the remark that he had always thought Hare, after Charles Townshend, the wittiest man he ever met with, but that Sheridan surpassed them both infinitely. Under these auspices his pen was readily enlisted on the side of the Opposition. Of his earlier efforts, however, an answer to Dr. Johnson's "Taxation no Tyranny," perished stillborn, and an "Essay on Irish Absentees" never advanced beyond a rough draft. He now became a contributor to *The Englishman*, a periodical in which Lord North's administration was held up to the scorn and opprobrium of mankind. Like most men of Irish extraction, Sheridan was a born journalist, and a paper in which the Premier was compared to the "most poor, *credulous* monster" of "The Tempest" may possibly have annoyed even Lord North's amiability, though it is equally possible that he did not take the trouble to read the lampoon.

Election to Brookes's Club, effected, if Wraxall may be trusted, in spite of the determined blackballing of George Selwyn and Lord Bessborough, converted Sheridan into a full-blown Whig, and at the general election of 1780 he was returned for Stafford. At the same time William Wilberforce was returned for Hull; and William Pitt, after unsuccessfully canvassing Cambridge, was brought in shortly afterwards for Appleby. It is well known that Sheridan's maiden speech was something like a failure, but his depression was of short duration, and he anticipated young Benjamin Disraeli by exclaiming to Woodfall, "It is in me, however, and, by God, it shall come out." However, he seems to have recognized that the House was not to be taken by storm, and for several sessions intervened but rarely in debate. Indeed his position was none of the most encouraging. He had no powerful borough-monger at his back, and his connection with the stage was resented by more than one member of that fastidious assembly. Thus Mr. Courtenay, "Lord North's deputy buffoon," accused him of not being able to endure wit in any house except his own; and even after he had been advanced to ministerial rank, a young prig named William Pitt, recommended him to confine his abilities to their proper stage—*sui plausu gaudere theatri.* The reply was wonderfully happy.

> "Flattered and encouraged by the Right Honourable Gentleman's panegyric on my talents, if ever I again engage in the composition he alludes to, I may be tempted to an act of presumption—to attempt an improvement on one of Ben Jonson's best characters, the character of the Angry Boy in the 'Alchemist.'"

Compelled to fight mainly for his own hand, Sheridan won his way by what Wraxall terms "a sort of fascination." To an insuperable command of temper was added that rare style of wit which is always appropriate and never offensive. Though nearly every sitter on the Government benches was exposed in turn to the sting of his satire, none of them ever had an excuse for calling him out. How, for instance, could a luckless pedant pick a quarrel with Sheridan when he began his reply to a speech full of classical quotations with—Τὸν δ'ἀπομειβόμενος προσέφη Sheridanios ἥρως? [1]

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[1] This version of the story has the authority of De Quincey ("Selections Grave and Gay," vol. ii. p. 41). Another version is that when the speaker, Lord Belgrave, had finished, Sheridan rose and declared that if the noble Lord had proceeded a little further and completed the quotation, he would have seen that it pointed

Though Sheridan took but little part in the debates on American affairs, which were the chief topic of discussion during the last years of Lord North's luckless ministry, he rapidly became an important member of the Whig party. In 1781 he was chosen to propose a motion against the employment of the military in the suppression of the Gordon Riots; and in the following year, when Lord North finally succumbed, was appointed Under-

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the other way. He then proceeded to rattle off, *ore rotundo*, a sentence of bogus Greek, the *ais* and *ois* of which completely took in Lord Belgrave, the House, and even Charles Fox, excellent scholar though he was. The second story is evidently an exaggeration of the first, and it may be that all that really happened was that Lord Belgrave misquoted, and Sheridan set him right. This view is borne out by some lines of Sheridan's, communicated to *Notes and Queries* of April, 1863, by "B. S.," evidently a member of the Sheridan family. They will be readily recognized as part of the series in which occurs the well-known verse—

"Johnny Wilkes, Johnny Wilkes,
Thou greatest of bilks," &c.

The lines are—

"Lord Belgrave, Lord Belgrave,
Why look you so hellgrave,
And why do you seldom now speak?
Have the damned Sunday papers
Giv'n your Lordship the vapours (*a*)
Or are you revising your Greek,
Lord Belgrave,
Or are you revising your Greek?" (*b*)

(*a*) *Vide* his Lordship's methodistical language in support of Mr. Wilberforce's motion to suppress the Sunday papers.

(*b*) See Debrett's reports of a celebrated Greek misquotation of his Lordship's.

Secretary of State to his friend Fox. He had, however, but little chance of distinguishing himself before the death of the Prime Minister, the Marquis of Rockingham, broke up the administration. When Lord Shelburne, "the Jesuit of Berkeley Square," accepted the office of first Lord of the Treasury, for which he had long been intriguing, Sheridan followed Fox into opposition. The step was a most disinterested one on the part of a lesser placeman, inasmuch as the majority of the Cabinet adhered to Shelburne, but Sheridan summed up the situation in a bright sentence: "Those who go are right, for there is really no other question but whether, having lost their power, they ought to stay and lose their characters." Unfortunately for their credit, the friends of Mr. Fox were not content to form an isolated Opposition, but, throwing themselves into the arms of Lord North, formed that coalition against Lord Shelburne upon which the verdict of history is one of merited, if somewhat exaggerated, condemnation. To Sheridan's sound common sense a union of parties, made in defiance of public opinion and past professions, seemed a proceeding fraught with danger, and he expostulated with his headstrong leader. "It is as fixed," was Fox's reply, "as the Hanover succession."[1]

Nothing but success, as Fox owned, could justify the

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[1] Lord John Townshend, writing many years afterwards, *i.e.*, in 1830, declared that Sheridan was most anxious for the Coalition, and that it was not until it failed that he began to declaim against it (Lord John Russell's "Memorials and Correspondence of C. J. Fox," vol. ii. p. 24). The tone of Sheridan's speeches, however, during his tenure of office supports the view taken in the text—that is, if the versions given by Wraxall can be relied upon.

Coalition, and success was not to be theirs. At first, however, they seemed practically invincible, and Sheridan, now Secretary to the Treasury, rendered them valuable service in debate through his readiness of tongue. "He improved daily in speech," wrote Horace Walpole, "turning all the Opposition said into excellent ridicule, and always brought the House into good humour with the Ministers." There seems to have been some sort of promise that on the first re-arrangement of the Cabinet, he should be made Chancellor of the Exchequer; but whatever hopes he may have cherished were cut short when the king, taking advantage of the clamour excited by Fox's India Bill, induced the House of Lords by a personal canvass to throw out the obnoxious measure, and then ordered the ministers to deliver up their seals of office. The rout of the Opposition at the general election, which followed Pitt's assumption of power in the teeth of a Parliamentary majority, was complete. Sheridan however managed to escape being one of "Fox's Martyrs," after expending over two thousand pounds on his election, with items—ale tickets, £40; subscription to clergymen's widows, £2 2s.

In the Parliament of 1784, Pitt was entirely master of the situation. Nearly 160 of the Opposition failed to re-appear, and on the new India Bill Mr. Fox only obtained a minority of 60 against a majority of 271. With a caution beyond his years the Prime Minister refrained from pressing heroic measures upon his supporters, who were for the most part reactionaries of the type of Mr. Rolle, the hero of the "Rolliad," and during the next few sessions schemes of financial reform, cautiously conceived and modestly introduced, were the topics of discussion. Sheridan, on the strength of his experience as Secretary to the Treasury, was put forward as the Opposition critic. Though Moore retails a somewhat absurd story about his qualifying himself for the post of honour by four days' study of arithmetic, there is no real reason why Sheridan should not have been quite as competent an authority on money matters as any other of Fox's followers, with the exception of Burke. Ignorance of finance was supreme on the Opposition benches. Fox himself confessed that he did not know why the Funds went up or down, and Lord John Cavendish, who had presided over the Exchequer in the Rockingham and Coalition ministries, was, for the time being, out of Parliament. Such criticism as Sheridan could offer, however, was practically valueless. He played round questions rather than attacked them directly, and failed alike to detect the merits of the commercial treaty with France, or the demerits of the sinking fund. At the same time he very nearly exposed the fallacy upon which that famous expedient was founded. Pitt, he declared, might say with the person in the comedy, "If you won't lend me the money, how can I pay you?" Even more shortsighted was the support given by him to the clamour raised by the English merchants against Pitt's measure for establishing commercial equality between England and Ireland. Sheridan loved his country, but his advocacy of her interests was not always well-advised. It was that of a fighting politician, not of a statesman.

As a relief to dull debates on financial and administrative reform, came in 1786 the impeachment of Warren Hastings. The indictment of the ex-Governor-General, as every schoolboy knows, had long been determined upon by Burke; it was precipitated by the indiscretion of Hastings' supporter, Major Scott. In April the charges were laid before the House, and the leaders of the Opposition proceeded to show cause for moving for an impeachment. After Burke had dealt with the Rohilla War, and Fox with Cheyte Singh, came the prorogation. Of the merits of that great and intricate case it is unnecessary to say further here than that in spite of much exaggeration on the part of Hastings' accusers, there can be no doubt that on more than one point they proved their charges up to the hilt. Yet Hastings saved an empire by his exactions from the native princes, and if ever the end justified the means, it did so in his case. However, such considerations are only too apt to go to the wall when a question is made one of party, and so far as Sheridan was concerned it is only due to him to say that of all the gravamina laid at the Governor-General's door, his conduct towards the Begums of Oude is the least defensible. This charge Sheridan made his own, and on February 7, 1787, delivered a speech which was universally regarded as one of the most magnificent displays of oratory that had ever been exhibited.[1] 2 p.

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[1] It is perhaps unnecessary to point out, at this time of day, the thorough wrong-headedness of Macaulay's conception of Hastings' character. The authentic materials for a dispassionate examination of his wonderful administration have now been given to the world by Mr. G. W. Forrest, in his "Selections from State Papers, preserved in the Foreign Department of the Government of India, 1772–1785."

It would of course be absurd to suppose that Sheridan in his indictment of Hastings was animated by the pious, though Quixotic, zeal of Burke, or by Fox's generous, if misguided, enthusiasm for humanity. Still it would be equally unjust to assume that he regarded the Begum charge simply as an opportunity for display, or that he was not inspired by something better than a mere advocate's enthusiasm. It is true that during the preparation of Fox's India Bill, he had wished that it should not be made retrospective in any of its clauses, and had gone so far as to inquire of Major Scott, Hastings' champion in the House, whether, if the Governor-General were recalled, he would come home. But it is more than probable that, indolent as he naturally was, Sheridan at that date had only partially acquainted himself with the facts of Hastings' administration. Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that he seized the occasion of the Begum speech with admirable dexterity. Pitt's sudden change of front after Fox's speech on the wrongs of Cheyte Singh had practically given Hastings over to the enemy, and Sheridan spoke to an audience which was more than willing to hear him. But he made the impeachment inevitable. Unfortunately the speech was so badly reported, that it may be said to have perished. The only passage in which even a faint echo of Sheridan's eloquence is preserved, is the following description of the East India Company :—

> "Alike in the political and military line could be observed auctioneering ambassadors and trading generals—and thus we saw a revolution brought about by affidavits ; an army employed in

executing an arrest; a town besieged on a note of hand; a prince dethroned for the balance of an account. Thus they exhibited a government, which united the mock majesty of a bloody sceptre, and the little traffic of a merchant's counting-house, wielding a truncheon with one hand, and picking a pocket with the other."

But if we have not the speech, we know at any rate how it was received. He sat down not merely amidst cheering, but amidst the loud clapping of hands, in which the Lords below the bar and the strangers in the gallery joined, and the excitement was so great that the debate had to be adjourned. Such was the effect upon the public that within four-and-twenty hours he was offered a thousand pounds for the copyright of the speech if he would himself correct it for the press. Possibly from indolence, but more probably from motives of discretion, Sheridan did not avail himself of the offer. The opinion of highly competent judges fully endorsed that of the public. Burke declared it to be "the most astonishing effort of eloquence, argument, and wit united of which there was any record or tradition." Mr. Fox said "all that he had ever heard, all that he had ever read, dwindled into nothing, and vanished like vapour before the sun." And Mr. Pitt acknowledged "that it surpassed all the eloquence of ancient or modern times, and possessed everything that genius or art could furnish, to agitate or control the human mind."

The impeachment of Hastings resolved upon, Sheridan was appointed one of the managers. So high was the general expectation that Fox recommended him to repeat his former speech with very little change. But Sheridan had other views. Though there was some difficulty in getting him to attend the committees, he had every intention of making a supreme effort, and, aided by his wife, prepared his evidence with the utmost care. When the time came, he was equal to the occasion, and for three days (June 3rd, 6th, and 10th, 1788) that audience in Westminster Hall, which Macaulay has described in an immortal passage, hung upon his lips. Fortunately we have the speech, edited by Dr. Bond, the late principal librarian of the British Museum, from the shorthand reporter's notes, almost in its entirety, and it is quite possible to form a fair idea of its merits and demerits. To look upon Sheridan as a mere rhetorician would of course be the last degree of absurdity. On the contrary, the result of a perusal of the whole speech is an impression of logical arrangement, close reasoning, and carefully selected evidence. No barrister could have marshalled the facts with a more critical sense of their legal effect; no solicitor could have got up the case with a keener eye to discrepancies in dates, or to the difference in tone between the public and private letters of Hastings and his officers. Nor were the elaborate bursts of prepared eloquence mere *purpurei panni;* they appear, on the contrary, to arise naturally from what has gone before, though it is true that they can be detached from the argument without materially affecting it. To attempt a summary of Sheridan's argument here would be impossible, and all that can be done is to give one or two specimens of his most finished periods, and even so we must exclude the highly-wrought description of the zenana.

Hastings claimed that he was actuated by state necessity; upon which Sheridan said:—

> "My Lords, . . . I want to strip the crimes which we charge upon this man of all that false glare which, in the eyes of weak and timid men, dazzle and produce a sort of false respect to guilt. I want to strip them of everything that can give dignity to crimes. I want to show your Lordships the coarse and homely nature of his offences. State necessity! No, my Lords; that imperial tyrant, state necessity, is yet a generous despot. Bold is his demeanour, rapid his decisions, and terrible his grasp. But what he does, my Lords, he dares avow, and, avowing, scorns any other justification than the great motives that placed the iron sceptre in his hand. But a skulking, quibbling, pilfering, prevaricating state necessity—a state necessity that tries to skulk behind the skirts of justice—a state necessity that tries to steal a pitiful justification from whispered accusations and fabricated rumours! No, my Lords, that is no state necessity. Tear off the mask, and you see coarse, vulgar avarice lurking behind the gaudy disguise, and adding the guilt of libelling the public honour to the fraud of private peculation."

And here are Sheridan's reflections on the desolation of Bengal occasioned by the rapacity of the Company's officers :—

> "If your Lordships look over the evidence, you will see a country that, even in the time of Suja-ud-Dowla, is represented as populous—desolated. A person looking at this shocking picture of calamity would have been inclined to ask, if he had been a stranger to what had passed in India—if we could suppose a person to have come suddenly into the country, unacquainted with any of the circumstances that had passed since the days of Suja-ud-Dowla—he would naturally ask, 'What cruel hand has wrought this wide desolation? What barbarian foe has invaded the country, has desolated its fields, depopulated its villages?' He would ask, 'What disputed succession, what civil rage, what mad frenzy of the inhabitants, has induced them to act in hostility to the beneficent works of God and the beauteous works of man?' He would ask, 'What religious zeal or frenzy has added to the mad despair and horrors of war? The ruin is unlike anything that appears recorded in any age. It looks

neither like the barbarities of men nor the judgment of vindictive Heaven. There is a waste of desolation, as if caused by fell destroyers never meaning to return, and who made but a short period of their rapacity. It looks as if some fabled monster had made its passage through the country, whose pestiferous breath has blasted more than its voracious appetite could devour.'

"If there had been any men in the country who had not their heart and soul so subdued by fear as to refuse to speak the truth at all upon such a subject, they would have told him that there had been no war since the time of Suja-ud-Dowla—tyrant indeed as he was, but then deeply regretted by his subjects;—that no hostile blow of any enemy had been struck in that land; that there had been no disputed succession, no civil war, no religious frenzy; but that these were the tokens of British friendship, the marks of the embraces of British alliance—more dreadful than the blows of the bitterest enemy. That they had made a prince a slave, to make him the principal in the extortion upon his subjects. They would tell him that their rapacity increased in proportion as the means of supplying their avarice diminished. They made their sovereign pay as if they had a right to an increased price, because the labour of extortion and plunder increased. They would tell him that it was to these causes these calamities were owing. . . .

"And then I am asked to prove why these people arose in such concert. There must have been machinations, and the Begums' machinations, to produce this; there was concert. Why did they rise? Because they were people in human shape; the poor souls had human feelings. Because patience under the detested tyranny of man is rebellion to the sovereignty of God. Because allegiance to that Power that gives us the forms of men commands us to maintain the rights of men. And never yet was this truth dismissed from the human heart—never, in any time, in any age—never in any clime where rude men ever had any social feeling, or where corrupt refinement had subdued all feeling—never was this unextinguishable truth destroyed from the heart of man, placed in the core and centre of it by its Maker, that man was not made the property of man; that human power is a trust for human benefit; and that, where it is abused, revenge is justice, if not the duty of the injured. These, my Lords, are the causes why these people rose."

Here is one of Sheridan's elaborate sarcasms:—

"I beg your Lordships to observe that the committee appointed to draw up the charges for the Commons had at that time regularly recapitulated every one of the cruelties, the severities, and [had dealt with] the famished state of the Khourd Mahal. Upon that recapitulation Mr. Hastings states he had had full and perfect explanation; and then, having had that explanation, he makes this concluding remark: 'Because I hold the whole series of the acts thus connected strictly reconcilable to justice, honour, and good policy, whoever were the parties concerned in them.' Now, my Lords, recollect, I beseech you, the information we had from Major Scott, the incomparable agent of Mr. Hastings, relative to this passage. You will recollect that this incomparable Major Scott told you at your Bar that after the defence had been finished—that after Mr. Hastings had approved of it—Mr. Hastings added this paragraph with his proper hand. He seems to have said to Mr. Middleton, 'You have done well indeed in owning these transactions. You have done what I expected from you. You have acted up to that character in your celebrated letter from Lucknow, when you offered, God willing'—and never had a man more reason to trust in the connivance of God for awhile to wickedness than this agent had—'that you were ready, God willing, not only to do anything, but to take the share of any blame upon yourself. You have done well, my trusty agent, in this; but you have not defended the acts—you have not said that they were defensible by justice or policy. Give me the paper, puny profligate! My conscience is light; my character will bear it out. I will claim merit and applause from them. I will state that they were reconcilable to honour, justice, and policy'—by policy I presume he means that wise and just policy which conducts good actions to a wise and good end. This seems the dialogue between him and Middleton. Mr. Middleton doubtless extends the compliment. 'I will own everything. You find character; I'll find memory'—and memory is his forte. 'You bear the sword; I'll carry the shield.' And forth these twin warriors sally to encounter the justice and indignation of their country."

The celebrated outburst on filial piety ran as follows:—

> "And yet, my Lords, how can I support the claim of filial love by argument, much less the affection of a son to a mother, where love loses its awe, and veneration is mixed with tenderness? What can I say upon such a subject? What can I do but repeat the ready truths which, with the quick impulse of the mind, must spring to the lips of every man on such a theme? Filial love—the morality, the instinct, the sacrament of nature—a duty; or, let me say, it is miscalled a duty, for it flows from the heart without effort—its delight—its indulgence, its enjoyment. It is guided not by the slow dictates of reason; it awaits not encouragement from reflection or from thought; it asks no aid of memory; it is an innate but active consciousness of having been the object of a thousand tender solicitudes; a thousand waking watchful cares, of much anxiety and patient sacrifices unremarked and unrequited by the object. It is a gratitude founded upon a conviction of obligations not remembered, but the more binding because not remembered—because conferred before the tender reason could acknowledge or the infant memory record them—a gratitude and affection which no circumstances should subdue, and which few can strengthen—a gratitude in which even injury from the object, though it may blend regret, should never breed resentment—and an affection which can be increased only by the decay of those to whom we owe it—then most fervent when the tremulous voice of age, resistless in its feebleness, inquires for the natural protectors of its cold decline."

When Sheridan, at the close of a brilliant peroration, sank as though exhausted into the arms of Burke—an excellent piece of theatrical business—it was felt by more than one critic that, rare though the display had been, it had fallen short of the speech in the House of Commons. Burke indeed exclaimed to Fox, "There, that is the true style; something between poetry and prose, and better than either." But Fox retorted with sense—"Such a mixture is for the advantage of neither, as producing poetic prose, or, still worse, prosaic poetry." Indeed, the opinion of many competent judges was that the style was too glittering and too artificial, and that with less labour a more satisfactory, if less splendid, result would have been forthcoming. Horace Walpole thought that Sheridan did not "quite satisfy the passionate expectation that had been raised, but it was impossible that he should, when people had worked themselves into an enthusiasm of offering fifty guineas for a ticket to hear him." Lord Grenville, who heard both speeches, pronounced the second vastly inferior to the first. Similarly, during the House of Common's speech, Sir Gilbert Elliot (Lord Minto) recorded that "the *bone* rose repeatedly in his throat, and tears in his eyes." But at the close of the first day's speech in Westminster Hall, he remarked, with much acuteness, that "Sheridan's flowers are produced by great pains, skill, and preparation, and are delivered in perfect order, tied up in regular though *beautiful bouquets*, and quite unlike Burke's wild and natural nosegays. I think in this respect that Sheridan's *excellence* becomes *perversely* a sort of defect; for the fine periods and passages are so *salient* from the rest, are so finished, and bear so strongly the evidence of regular and laborious composition produced by premeditation and delivered by memory, as to give the whole performance a character of design and artificial execution which keeps the author rather than his work, the orator than his speech, before you, which draws the attention away from the *purpose* to the *performance*, and which can at most exercise the wonder and admiration of his audience, leaving both their passions and their judgment unaffected."

These remarks on a particular speech may be supplemented by a criticism of a more general character, which is to be found in the "Reminiscences" of Charles Butler, the legal writer and Catholic apologist. "Sheridan," he says, "required great preparation for the display of his talents: hence he was not a debater—one who attacks and defends on every occasion that calls him forth. . . . But though Mr. Sheridan was no debater, he was sometimes most felicitous in an epigrammatic reply. He had very little information; had even little classical learning; but the powers of his mind were very great. He had a happy vein of ridicule—he could, however, rise to the serious and severe—and then his style of speaking was magnificent; but even in his happiest effusions he had too much prettiness."

Add to these qualities a commanding rather than handsome presence, a hazel eye of remarkable penetration, and a voice which, if sometimes indistinct, as on the first day of the Westminster Hall speech, was, as a rule, sonorous and rich, an utterance of extraordinary fluency, and we have Sheridan the orator before us so far as it is possible to recall him now. Of the four great speakers of the time—and it was an age of Parliamentary eloquence which will bear comparison with any that have preceded or succeeded it—Sheridan was certainly the most effective. In wit he surpassed all his contemporaries, and he avoided alike the natural redundancy of Fox, and the deliberate diffusiveness of Pitt, of whose monotonous declamation he aptly remarked, "that his was a brain that never worked but when his tongue was set agoing, like some machines that are set in motion by a pendulum." Equally true is his estimate of the permanent value of the utterances of his great rival Burke. "What will they think ot the public speaking of this age in after-times when they read Mr. Burke's speeches, and are told that in his day he was not accounted either the first or the second speaker?" It is clear that Sheridan foresaw the time when Burke's philosophy would be a permanent source of political wisdom, while his own eloquence had become a voice and little more. Perhaps he did not greatly care for the opinion of posterity, and was content to win the applause of his hearers by his music, suavity, and lucidity, while Burke's harsh Irish accent, irritability, and profundity, annoyed and puzzled them. Nor can it be denied that from the practical point of view he was entirely right. Speeches are nominally made to win votes, and Sheridan is one of the very few speakers who have been able to alter materially the numbers on a division. He aimed at the ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα, not the κτῆμα ἐς ἀεὶ, and he had his reward. His methods of preparation were conducive to that end. Burke the statesman prepared his argument with care, and trusted to the inspiration of the moment for his illustrations. Sheridan the rhetorician, spent enormous labour on his ornaments, polishing his own wit, and occasionally pressing that of others into service, and having once mastered the facts, left the argument to be supplied by his innate common-sense. He treasured up his figures from similar motives.

If a good phrase could not be used in one debate, he kept it until it could be employed with effect in another. But though he had a store of prepared epigrams on hand, his impromptu sallies were fully as good as his prepared witticisms. A perusal of his great speech in Westminster Hall impresses one with the conviction that he was, like all the orators of the past century, with the exception of Burke, to be heard rather than read. If he had prepared an edition of his speeches for the press, his readers might have been tempted to venture upon the converse proposition to Fox's true paradox, and say, "They read badly, then they were good speeches." Sheridan was content that their goodness should have been established by the unanimous verdict of his contemporaries, and has considerately spared us the trouble of deciding whether his speeches read well or badly.

Of the amount of preparation which he bestowed on a great effort we have evidence in the little memoir by Professor Smyth. On May 14, 1794, Sheridan was called upon to reply to Hastings' counsel. Though he had gone over the ground before, and intended to be comparatively brief, he worked for four days and the greater part of four nights at the papers, "until the motes were coming into his eyes." The speech itself deals with minute points of evidence, and is a monument of ingenuity rather than of eloquence. It is chiefly remembered because of the practical joke played by Sheridan on his audience, in causing an elaborate search to be made for a bag full of papers which had no existence, with the evident intention of astonishing them with the readiness of his resources. But it also contains a dignified rebuke to Hastings' counsel, Mr. Plumer, who had accused Sheridan of attempting to delude a witness by handing him a wrong treaty, and, taken as a whole, forms no unworthy conclusion to Sheridan's speeches on the impeachment. As specimens of partisan oratory—and they are essentially partisan—those speeches rank among the masterpieces of human eloquence. It is a pity that they do not display some slight appreciation of the necessities of empire.

CHAPTER VII.

IF the immortals are liable to human emotions, they must groan rather than smile over the monuments raised to their memory by the "standard" biographer. And it is not easy to recall any one who has been in this respect more unfortunate than Sheridan. Not that Moore is altogether to be blamed for the inadequacy of the record that he has left us. His acquaintance with Sheridan was but slight, and dated only from the period of his decline when he was expiring—a show, indeed, though assuredly not a driveller. Nor, though he seems to have taken some pains to collect information from those who had known Sheridan in his prime, do their reminiscences seem to have been particularly valuable. Again, one can well understand that a person of Sheridan's habits would not leave behind him a very complete or carefully arranged collection of *pièces justificatives*, though it is quite possible that Moore might have examined them more carefully than he did. He seems, indeed, to have become tired of the undertaking very soon, and to have hurried over the concluding part in a perfunctory manner. Lastly, as regards Sheridan's political career, Moore wrote too soon after his death to be able to tell the whole truth about one important side of it, his relations with George IV., and was himself too much of a partisan to deal fairly with many of its passages; for instance, his conduct on the outbreak of the French Revolution. In fact, if Moore had spent less time in padding out the book with windy Whig apologies, and more time in informing himself about prosaic questions like names and dates, his performance would have been far more satisfactory. Lord Melbourne, who was already in the field as Sheridan's biographer, when Moore undertook the task, is known to have expressed a regret that he yielded up his claims and materials to the professional writer.[1] Still more must posterity lament that Sheridan's accomplished granddaughter, Mrs. Norton, never carried out her intention of giving to the world some final account of the most talented member of a talented race.

Little light is thrown on Moore's darkness by Sheridan's other biographers. Dr. Watkins' life, which appeared before Moore's, is a mere scissors and paste affair. It contains no original information, and is written from an avowedly Tory standpoint, with a considerable spice of gratuitous malice, such as the insinuation that Sheridan was not the author of "The School for Scandal." The memoir of Professor Smyth, who was tutor to his son, Tom Sheridan, deals only with the period subsequent to the death of his first wife, when Sheridan had begun to go down-hill. It contains some interesting anecdotes about his private life, and not a little malevolent gossip, for which the professor was severely taken to task by Mrs. Norton. The anonymous Octogenarian, who professed to have been brought up at Sheridan's knee, dished up some stale anecdotes about the Prince of Wales, and evidently, as Sheridan would have said, "relied on his imagination for his facts," if not "on his memory for his wit."

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[1] Mrs. Norton in *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. iii.

An attempt, then, to form an estimate of Sheridan, apart from his writings and speeches, can at best be extremely imperfect. The man is a riddle. At times he was guilty of extravagances which caused superficial observers to set him down as a brilliant butterfly without any thought for the morrow. Nor can there be any doubt that the vice of ostentation was one of his most salient failings; he himself allowed he was always in an extreme, and that he expected wings to spring from his shoulders. Complaints of his vanity occur again and again in Fox's letters in connection with his political fortunes, while in society Lord John Townshend and Fitzpatrick used to declare that he was jealous even of a pretty woman. But the recollections of Smyth, his son's tutor, and others who knew him intimately, enable us to pronounce, with some confidence, that deep beneath a thoughtless exterior lay a solitary and unhappy soul. His literary tastes are an instance in point. Spenser, not Pope as we should imagine, was his favourite poet, while of Dryden, of whom he was also fond, the lines most frequently on his lips were the melancholy passage from "Palamon and Arcite."

> "Vain men! how vanishing a bliss we crave,
> Now warm in love, now withering in the grave;
> Never, oh, never more to see the sun;
> Still dark, in a damp vault, and still alone."

Add to these indications that he was a firm believer in dreams and portents, and had a rooted dislike of metaphysical discussion. When his son tried to entangle him in a debate on the doctrine of necessity, Sheridan at once disproved its cardinal thesis, the impossibility of indifference, by declaring that there was one thing which he could do with total, entire, thorough indifference, namely, listen to his questioner. He used to say, too, that those were intolerably cruel, who, because they have not the hopes and consolations of religion themselves, can find in their heart to destroy them in others. If we accept as genuine, as we surely may, these revelations of Sheridan's inner self, it is clear that the secret of his reckless moods may well have been a desire to silence the promptings of a gloomy and restless imagination. In any case, he was in many respects so great, that his memory deserves to be treated with reverence, not, as has been before now the case, made the subject of cheap and obvious satire.

Towards society Sheridan's attitude was peculiar, and in many respects unique. It sought him quite as much as he sought it; he ranked as the equal of the great men of his time, and would never have accepted for a moment the situation of a mere dependent of the nobility, afterwards occupied with much ostentation by his biographer Moore. It is probable that he made his way through the advocacy of the ladies, for instance, of Mrs. Crewe, to whom he dedicated "The School for Scandal," and of Mrs. Greville, whose accomplishments are celebrated in an admirably turned preface to "The Critic." Mrs. Sheridan won over the men. His devotion to so worthless a

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patron as the Prince of Wales must be condemned without reserve, and, as will be noticed later on, its effect upon his own fortunes was lamentable in the extreme. But so far as we know—for the secrets of Carlton House were well kept, and it is not quite clear what were the services of a non-political nature which Sheridan rendered to the Prince beyond those of a boon-companion and amateur steward—the connection was not incompatible with a fair amount of self-respect on the part of the servant. It is true that he allowed himself to be mixed up in a dubious affair which abruptly terminated the Prince of Wales' connection with Newmarket. In 1791, Sam Chifney, the Prince's jockey, was accused of pulling Escape on the first day of the October meeting, in order to affect the betting on the next day's race, which the horse was allowed to win. Sir Charles Bunbury was thereupon sent to warn the Prince that if he continued to let Chifney ride for him no gentleman's horse would start against him, and George, in high dudgeon, broke up his stable and sedulously avoided the heath. But his conduct was not incompatible with innocence, and one does not see why Fox accused Sheridan of want of principle when he acted as the Prince's advocate before the Jockey Club.[1] Besides, with the exception of an occasional loan, he incurred no pecuniary obligations to George until towards the close of their long acquaintance. Nor was he ever servile; on the contrary, he treated appointments at Carlton House with the same negligence as he treated those with Smyth, or an impecunious dramatist. Even at his worst Sheridan seems never to have wholly lost a fine sense of the dignity of independence.

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[1] If, indeed, that was the occasion on which Sheridan appeared as the Prince's advocate. The information on the point is rather vague.

But if Sheridan did not truckle to the leaders of society, he took more than his share in dissipations which they could afford and he could not. The game was barely worth the candle. It is true that he was not a gambler, and he made his wild bets at Brookes's, as Professor Minto has well remarked, during the period when he was driven to extra recklessness by the death of his wife. But his extravagant entertainments must have formed a serious item in his embarrassments, and he persisted in them long after his circumstances had become hopelessly involved. Perhaps he felt that rumours of retrenchment would only precipitate the crash. Again, his drinking habits were notorious even in a drunken age, with serious consequences to his character. Possibly there is not much difference, from the standpoint of abstract morality, between Pitt getting decorously fuddled on port, and Sheridan becoming speechlessly "forrarder" on claret, and latterly on brandy. But the practical bearing of their potations on the fortunes of the two men will hardly bear comparison. Pitt died Prime Minister, while Sheridan died a pauper, just as the bibulous Pitt was incommoded only by a shaking hand in private, while the convivial Sheridan's purple face and blazing nose were the theme of the Premier's witticisms in the House of Commons, and the laughing-stock of many a hustings crowd. In short, Pitt's indiscretions affected himself only, while Sheridan's were something like a public calamity.

In spite of his over-devotion to the bottle, Sheridan's company was the delight alike of London drawing-rooms and of country-houses. Lord Holland tells us that when he was in his prime nothing could exceed the evenness of his temper, or the readiness with which he made light of his embarrassments. He was above all things a gentleman, urbane and full of consideration, silent as a rule, except when he saw a chance of saying something that was worth saying, and then he made his effect with unerring certainty. So brilliant indeed were his interpositions in conversation, that people used to hint that they were prepared beforehand, and that the attack was only delivered after a long course of elaborate manœuvres. It may have been so in some cases, but certainly not in all, though we have little means of judging. Boswell sets down a conversation at the Club when Sheridan was there, but he seems to have been repressed by the presence of his elders. Fanny Burney met him at Mrs. Cholmondeley's, in 1779, and recorded her impressions at some length. But Sheridan's wit on this occasion confined itself to the remark that ladies should not write verses until they were past receiving them, and his time was chiefly spent in paying elaborate compliments to the delighted young authoress. Again, Windham noted in his diary that he met Sheridan at Mrs. Crewe's in 1794, after the split in the Whig party. "The charm of his conversation," he wrote, "and the memory of past times made me regret the differences that now separate us." These indications of Sheridan at his best are vague enough, and we must be content to accept the universal verdict of Sheridan's contemporaries without seeking to inquire into its cause. Indeed, the isolated specimens of his wit that survive are few, and quite as disappointing as those of George Selwyn, Hare, or the other brilliant talkers of the time. It was probably manner rather than matter that gave point to such a remark as—"By the silence that prevails I conclude that Lauderdale has been making a joke"; or his reply to the same friend's request to repeat one of his stories, "I must be on my guard in future; for a joke in your mouth is no laughing matter." Rather better was his answer to the elderly maiden lady who wished to take him for a walk in doubtful weather—"It has cleared up enough for *one* but not enough for *two*;" and the saying that a tax upon milestones would be unconstitutional, "as they were a race that could not *meet* to remonstrate."

This much at any rate seems clear, that Sheridan's aim was to delight and amuse rather than to wound. He was a man

"Whose humour, as gay as the fire-fly's light,
Played round every subject, and shone as it played,
Whose wit, in the combat as gentle as bright,
Ne'er carried a heart-stain away on its blade."

And in the same way his practical jokes in country-houses were the sheer outcome of animal spirits, and on the whole as innocent as his cricket with the children, and as harmless as his Cockney attempts at shooting. Fairly familiar specimens of them are his introduction of a young farmer to Mrs. Crewe as his friend Joseph Richardson, with the result that she was horrified at the oddness of his manners and language; and the sermon which he wrote for Mr. O'Beirne, afterwards a bishop, and which, besides containing the unintentional blunder, "It is easier for a camel, as *Moses* says," was nothing less than a scathing comment on the penurious habits of a member of the congregation. In his later years, when past playing jokes himself, he was the inspiring spirit of Charles Mathews' most famous mystifications. Practical jokes formed indeed a prominent feature in Sheridan's more intimate friendships, as Tickell discovered when he pursued Sheridan into an ambuscade of crockery carefully prepared in a dark passage. Richardson he once compelled to pay his cab fare by beckoning him into a cab, entangling him in a violent disputation, and then jumping out with the exclamation that he would not sit any longer by the side of such a fellow. Another feature in his friendships was literary jealousy, for Sheridan was not too scrupulous in laying claim to the best part of his friends' work, and gravely assured Tierney that he had written the greater portion of Tickell's pamphlet, "Anticipation." Yet, though the relations between the two were often strained, Sheridan on the suicide of Tickell, in 1793, at once gave a home to his widow,[1] and provided for his boys, sending one of them into the Navy, and procuring for the other a situation in India, and this though he was in great straits at the time. Ten years later, when Joseph Richardson died, Sheridan arrived too late for the funeral, but characteristically made up for the neglect by persuading the clergyman to perform the ceremony over again. With these two exceptions, however, Sheridan seems to have been a man of many acquaintances rather than of many friends. Everybody knew him, but with few people did he ever open out his heart. His connection with Fox, Lord John Townshend, and Lord Lauderdale, seems to have been prompted by political motives quite as much as by the affections, and to have waned when his devotion to Carlton House caused him to act in opposition to the bulk of the Whig party. It was characterized by that love of independence which marked his relations with the Prince; he was never a parasite, and never in the habit of sponging on his associates.

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[1] Born Leigh. Tickell's first wife, who died in 1787, was a sister of Mrs. Sheridan.

Sheridan's dealings with his family were in many respects admirable. He was a good son, and though his father had treated him with harshness and caprice, his efforts to win back the old man's heart were persevering, and his attentions during his last illness unceasing. As his brother and sisters lived mostly in Ireland, Sheridan saw little of them, but their relations, thanks to the industrious correspondence of Mrs. Sheridan, seem to have been conducted on the most affectionate terms. As to his married life, the evidence is rather inconclusive. Mrs. Sheridan, beautiful, amiable, and natural, whom even the licentious Wilkes declared to be the most lovely flower that ever grew in nature's garden, seems to have been thoroughly devoted to her husband's interests. She acted as his political secretary and confidante, and watched over the interests of the theatre. There she kept an account of the receipts, read the new pieces sent in, and besides helping him in the composition of "The Duenna," is known to have adapted from the French a spectacular piece called "Richard Cœur de Lion." She may have been liable to be carried away by her own and her husband's social success; but, on the whole, she made Sheridan an excellent wife. Her letters are among the most pleasant in Moore's book, and combine a good deal of very excellent advice with much artless gaiety and wholly spontaneous affection. This is how the pair appeared to Fanny Burney in 1779:—

> "The elegance of Mrs. Sheridan's beauty is unequalled by any that I ever saw, except Mrs. Crewe. I was pleased with her in all respects. She is much more lively and agreeable than I had any idea of finding her; she was very gay and unaffected and totally free from airs of any kind. . . . Mr. Sheridan has a fine figure, and a good, though I don't think a handsome, face. He is tall and very upright, and his appearance and address are at once manly and fashionable without the smallest tincture of foppery or modish graces. In short, I like him vastly, and think him every way worthy of his beautiful companion. And let me tell you what I know will give you as much pleasure as it gave me, that, by all I could observe in the course of the evening, and we stayed very late, they are extremely happy in each other: he evidently adores her, and she as evidently idolizes him. The world has by no means done him justice."

Unfortunately this mutual idolatry was by no means incompatible with numerous quarrels. They were alike of a romantic and jealous disposition. And while it is certain that on Mrs. Sheridan's side there was only too much cause for tears and recriminations, Sheridan seems to have been racked by suspicions which had no real foundation—notwithstanding the scandal that connected his wife's name with that of Lord Edward Fitzgerald—and to have been indignant that while he took his pleasures abroad she should have entertained a circle of worshippers at home. Even in her happier moments she wrote to her sister-in-law: "So Mrs. —— is not happy; poor thing, I dare say, if the truth were known, he teases her to death. Your *very good* husbands generally contrive to make you sensible of their merit somehow or other." With all his faults as a husband, Sheridan loved her deeply, and was filled with remorse during their temporary estrangements. "Could anything bring back those first feelings?" he used to say; "Yes, perhaps, the cottage in East Burnham might." But there does not seem to have been anything like a permanent coldness; indeed the failure to appreciate so charming a companion would have argued a vulgarity of taste of which he was quite incapable. Sheridan possibly remembered a sentence in the Latin Grammar—"*Amantium iræ, amoris integratio est*"—and acted upon it. When, in spite of his constant devotion, she died of consumption in 1792, his sorrow was prolonged and violent. "The victory of the grave," he wrote, "is sharper than the sting of death;" and when shortly afterwards the infant daughter followed the mother to the tomb he was quite frantic with grief.

Of Sheridan's second marriage which, after a violent flirtation with Pamela, the adopted daughter of Mme. de Genlis, he contracted in 1795 with Miss Ogle, daughter of the Dean of Winchester, there is not much to be said except that it may be described as an exaggerated repetition of his first. He was then aged forty-four and barely able to keep his head above water. In Smyth's brief memoir of Sheridan is given an animated picture of his restless and extravagant manner of life immediately after the first Mrs. Sheridan's death, of the three establishments kept up in various parts of the country while he himself lived at an hotel, of the livery-stables full of horses whose corn-bills were hopelessly in arrear, of a housekeeper without any money to buy provisions, of a tutor without his salary. To introduce order and economy into such a household would have been a hopeless task for a young bride, and certainly the second Mrs. Sheridan seems to have thought that the attempt was not worth making. For, except when provoked beyond measure by his irregularities, she seems to have been content to regard him with an uncritical admiration, as may be judged from her remark—"As to my husband's talents, I will not say anything about them, but I will say that he is the *handsomest* and honestest man in England."[1] Yet at times she was severely tried. Thus Harness records that he once discovered her walking up and down her drawing-room in a frantic state of mind and calling her husband a villain. After some hesitation she explained the cause of her disorder. She had just discovered that the love-letters written to her were copies of those which Sheridan had sent to his first wife. Towards the other member of the strange household, his son Tom, Sheridan acted, as one might expect, the part of an easy-going elder brother, rather than that of a father. He was morbidly anxious after his health, and took pride in his cleverness, but gave him no regular education, and, with the exception of a brief spell at soldiering, no regular profession. "Tom," he complacently remarked, "you have genius enough to get a dinner every day in the week at the first tables in London, and that is something, but that is all, you will go no farther." And when Tom said that if he went into Parliament he would attach himself to neither party, but hang out a notice, "Lodgings to let," his parent rejoined, "Yes; Unfurnished." Not a good sort of bringing-up, but much the same as Sheridan himself had received.

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[1] Catalani, on the contrary, remarked, with much more truth, that he had "beaucoup de talent et très peu de beauté."

When Sheridan's critics talk about his want of principle, they usually mean his laxity in money matters. It was Lord Holland's theory that he had formed a totally unattainable ideal of moral rectitude, and thought nothing worth aiming at which fell short of that ideal, and that kind of reasoning is by no means rare. But Richardson, who knew Sheridan far more intimately than Lord Holland—they frequently backed one another's bills—was probably nearer the truth when he said, "that it was his sincere conviction that could some enchanter's wand touch Sheridan into the possession of fortune it would instantly convert him into a being of the nicest honour and the most unimpeachable moral excellence." And to those who possess a fluctuating income themselves, or who have friends in that position, the good sense of Richardson's observation will be at once apparent.

Sheridan's difficulties sprang from several causes. Thriftlessness was in his blood, and the tendency had been increased by his haphazard education as well as by the extraordinary rapidity of his rise. Even if he had not been naturally inclined to display, his public position both as the chief proprietor of Drury Lane and as a statesman compelled him to adopt a lavish style of entertainment. Besides, it would have been almost impossible, even if he had tried to regulate his expenditure, to anticipate with any certainty what his income from the theatre would be for the next month or even for the next week. Again, his sanguine nature induced him to underrate his embarrassments, while his habits of procrastination and want of method caused him to increase them tenfold. "Letters unanswered," groans Smyth, "promises, engagements, the most natural expectations totally disregarded. He seemed quite lawless and out of the pale of human sympathies and obligations." Certainly any one who became in any way a creditor of Sheridan's must have had many an anxious moment. Yet Smyth forgave him. So too Messrs. Hammersley, his bankers, who must have known Sheridan well, told Moore that they were certain he never meant to cheat. Again the Linleys were the victims of one of his most discreditable transactions, whereby they were induced to part with their share in Drury Lane for annuities which were never paid them. Yet the younger Linley told the same authority that he acquitted Sheridan of any low premeditated design in his various shifts and contrivances. Sheridan's tradesmen are far less deserving of sympathy, indeed it is probable that much pity has been wasted on them. His theory evidently was that it was a trial of skill between them and himself, if by repeated dunning they could get their money, well and good. But if he could talk them over or evade payment so much the better. Boaden, in his "Life of Kemble," tells us that so cordial were Sheridan's manners, his glance so masterly, and his address so captivating, that tradesmen for the most part seemed to forget that they actually wanted money, and went away from his *levée* as if they had only come to look at him. Their case was regarded by him as altogether different to an obligation incurred towards a friend. A creditor once found Sheridan in unexpected possession of money. He was told that it was to meet a debt of honour. The creditor thereupon burnt his bond before Sheridan's face, and declared that he should consider his debt as one of honour, and Sheridan paid him at once. As a rule he was eventually driven into a corner. Though his tradesmen had to wait for their money, they received in the end a hundred and fifty per cent., while as he never kept his receipts and scorned to examine items, the dishonest were paid two or three times over. It is clear too that a pure love of fun was the actuating motive of many of his most ingenious subterfuges. It gave him supreme pleasure to induce a creditor to show off the paces of a horse while he bolted up a narrow passage, or to borrow £25 more from a lender to whom he already owed several hundreds. "My dear fellow," he once said, "hear reason; the sum you ask *me* for is a very considerable one; whereas I only ask you for five-and-twenty pounds." It would be absurd to criticise seriously a person of such an irresponsible temperament. Rogers was right when he said that in his dealings with the world Sheridan certainly carried the privileges of genius as far as they were ever carried by any man. But after all posterity has no right to look upon such abuses as a matter in which it has any personal concern.

To these remarks on Sheridan's money transactions may be added, by way of illustration, some extracts from his letters to Peake, the treasurer of Drury Lane, a collection of which is among the MSS. at the British Museum. It is needless to state that they are undated. Here is one written from the Shakespeare Club on Saturday night, and couched in a curiously rambling hand :—

> "You must positively come to me here and bring £60 in your pocket. Fear nothing. Be civil to all claimants, and trust me in three months there will not exist one unsatisfied claimant. Shut up the office and come here directly. Keep as punctual with Kemble as you can. . . . Borrow and fear not. . . . God bless you till I see you again, when I will make a success of all difficulties."

Here is another letter written from Newcastle where Sheridan was, as was often the case with him, "money-bound" :—

> "I am so uneasy that I send Edwards back. I am sure you will do anything possible to keep things straight for a fortnight. I am without a shilling for Tom and Mrs. S——. Try a few small loans as a personal favour to me. I never ask'd anyone but Mitchell. Don't write me a croaking letter, and you shall see what a lasting settlement I will make on my return so that you shall have no more of these anxieties. God bless you.
>
> "I owe £40 at Newcastle."

Poor Peake! his must have been an anxious life. At one time he is directed to arrange some way of settling a tradesman's bill, at another to borrow money for the taxes. "Discounting small acceptance with a douceur must be the way," wrote Sheridan, and the phrase is worthy of insertion in one of his comedies. Then Mrs. Sheridan had been assured by her husband that a certain sum should be sent her every week; why did not Peake forward it? And it is needless to add that Tom Sheridan's appeals for money were incessant. The following is a specimen:—

> "If you can possibly do so, send me ten or twenty pounds. I have not, by God, been master of a guinea scarcely since I have been in town and wherever I turn myself I am disgrac'd—to my Father it is in vain to apply. He is mad and so shall I be if I don't hear from you." [1]

Sheridan once told Charles Butler that his supreme ambition was to be the best possible manager of a theatre. But when a manager is compelled by his private debts to make perpetual raids on the treasury, it is evident that he falls very short of that ideal. On the other hand, it is certain that Sheridan had great and abnormal difficulties to struggle against. The nature of the ownership of theatrical property must always be a mystery to the layman, and Moore who might have fathomed its depths, so far as Drury Lane was concerned, seems to have shirked the difficulty with the conventional plea that it was unnecessary to bother the reader with a mass of wearisome details. As an excuse for Moore it may be stated that the variety of interests and authorities in the theatre seems to have been considerable. The profits from the private boxes did not go to the ordinary shareholders, but were under a separate and conflicting control; there were also two classes of renters, the old and the new. Besides Sheridan, so far from being the autocrat that one would imagine, was supposed latterly, at any rate, to act under the directions of a Board of Management before he accepted a piece for the stage.

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[1] Here is another of Tom Sheridan's missives:—"To-morrow I propose setting off for Stafford town, if I can raise the supplies. I want £20 to start with, and on the road I have a hoard lying *perdue* that will carry me through. I should have wished a few minutes' conversation with you before I went. Can you give me any hint or advice as to my conduct there? Write me an answer, but, above all, do not disappoint me as to the cash. My father gives me *none*, and is mad I believe."

> "Every day's experience," he writes on May 26, 1778, after a dispute about the boxes, "with the persons I have had to deal with determines me to be trifled with in this business no longer, and paid I will be the whole of my debt some way or other. At least I will not look on and see many other persons paid before me, for no reason but because I have never pressed my claims, or because I have done the greatest service to the Property, and been the principal cause of other People getting paid at all."

Under the circumstances it can hardly be wondered that he should have been feverishly anxious to buy out as many of the other proprietors as possible, in order to get the control of the theatre into his own hands. And when once he had made up his mind, he was not a man to stick at obstacles whether they were great or small. Lacy, Dr. Ford, and the Linleys were successively got rid of; the Linleys by the ingenious expedient of annuities, but Dr. Ford demanded £17,000 in cash. It was some time before the sum was paid. Even Sheridan could not raise money by magic, and that he should have been able to do so at all argues considerable confidence on the part of his anonymous money-lenders in his business integrity and capacity.

These obligations had doubtless considerable effect upon the internal economy of the theatre. We read in Kelly's "Reminiscences" of tradesmen and scenery-painters unpaid, and it is known that the actors frequently had to go without their salaries.[1] Miss Farren once took the extreme step of absenting herself from the theatre—the occasion was during the run of Holcroft's "Force of Ridicule" in 1796—as a protest against Sheridan's conduct. But the manœuvre does not seem to have succeeded, for after her marriage she sent her husband, Lord Derby, to press for arrears. Sheridan gently remonstrated with the noble dun, "You have taken away from us the brightest jewel in the world; and you now quarrel with us for a little dust she has left behind her." But Miss Farren's conduct seems to have been quite the exception, and the actors, an easy-going class themselves, were blind to Sheridan's faults, and full of admiration for his fertility of resource. When an alarm of fire was raised, Suett was instructed to tell the audience that if they did not keep still they would be drowned by the enormous supplies of water in the establishment, and to wind up his remarks by making a face. When the King, while sitting in the royal box in the theatre, was shot at by a madman, Sheridan was equal to the occasion, and scribbled off an impromptu verse to "God Save the King," which evoked from all present a wild demonstration of patriotic fervour. Hear Kelly, who served him in several capacities, as manager of the Italian opera, as composer, and as an operatic singer: "During the five-and-twenty years through which I enjoyed his friendship and society, I never heard him say a word that could wound the feelings of a human being."[1] And yet Kelly in his time was arrested for debt to an upholsterer on furniture which Sheridan had ordered, but with which he had been rash enough to identify himself. Never did Sheridan's fascination of manner stand him in better stead than when dealing with his company, and it is only just to him to say that he never seems to have forgotten that he was himself an actor's son. For instance, nothing could exceed his kindness to Mrs. Robinson, and he never took advantage of the unprotected situation in which she was placed by her scamp of a husband.

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[1] On the other hand, Reynolds the playwright declares in his "Reminiscences" that his royalties were paid with the utmost regularity. So contradictory are the statements about this perplexing man.

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[1] This tribute to Sheridan does all the more credit to Kelly, because they had more than one tiff about money-matters. Thus there is at the British Museum the draft of a letter from Peake to Kelly:—

"I am desired by Mr. Sheridan to express his extreme astonishment at the letter you have thought fit to write to Mr. Peake. Your talking of 'lending *him* the £100 he *wants*,' he considers an insult and not proceeding from ignorance, real or pretended, of the Proposition he made you, which was that you should actually abate £100 from your salary this year, and certify it to the Trustees, in consequence of your having taken a sum of money last year from the Theatre for doing so little."

Nor does this power of managing men exhaust the list of Sheridan's good qualities as the director of a theatre. He had an instinctive knowledge of the public, and he inspired them with quite as much confidence in his undertakings as Whitbread and the other capitalists and business men who succeeded him. And if his own improvidence was the cause of the numerous financial crises that arose during his *régime*, he was unequalled in the resource with which those crises were overcome. Kelly tells us that he once went to Sheridan's house in despair, the performers of the Italian Opera having struck for arrears of salary amounting to £3,000, and the bankers, Messrs. Morland, having declined to advance a shilling. After two hours Sheridan appeared from his bedroom. "Three thousand pounds, Kelly," he said with the utmost coolness, "why there is no such sum in nature. There is one passage in Shakespeare," he continued, "which I have always admired particularly, and that is where Falstaff says, 'Master Robert Shallow, I owe you a thousand pounds.'—'Yes, Sir John,' says Shallow, 'which I beg you will let me take home with me.'—'That may not so easy be, Master Robert Shallow,' replies Falstaff; and so I say unto thee Master Mick Kelly, to get three thousand pounds may not so easy be." However, he drove off with Kelly to the bankers, and, continues the latter, "in less than a quarter of an hour, to my joy and surprise, out he came, with £3,000 in bank-notes in his hand. By what hocus-pocus he got them, I know not, nor can I imagine even at this moment, but those notes he brought to me, out of the very house, where, an hour or two before, the firm had sworn that they would not advance him another sixpence." Similarly when the opera-house had at last to close its doors, Sheridan allowed his co-lessee, Mrs. Harris, to find asylum at Boulogne while he remained and serenely faced the storm. Nor was it long before his plausible address enabled him to dispose of the remainder of the lease on very advantageous terms.

Even in minor matters Sheridan was probably far more energetic than has been generally supposed. Boaden says that although it took a Troy siege to engage his attention, he decided at length rapidly and correctly. In knowledge of stage-effect, as might be expected from his life-long connection with the theatre, he was very skilled. Kelly describes the method by which he was directed to compose the incidental music for "Pizarro." Sheridan, he says, made a sort of rumbling noise with his voice, resembling a dog's gruff bow-wow-wow, but though there was not the slightest resemblance to an air in the noise he made, yet so clear were his ideas of effect that Kelly perfectly understood his meaning. He seems, in fact, to have confined his own superintendence to the production of those spectacular pieces which the low taste of the public demanded, and where Shakespeare's plays were concerned to have relied entirely upon Kemble. It cannot, indeed, be said of Sheridan, that he was ambitious to raise the tone of the stage by the production of new plays of merit. He brought out at haphazard farces, spectacular pieces, musical medleys, Shakespeare, and revivals of his own comedies. But with his own exception it was an age of great actors rather than of great dramatists. Against Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, Mrs. Jordan, Miss Farren, Mrs. Powell, Bannister, and John Palmer are to be set writers like Holcroft, Cumberland, Reynolds, Monk Lewis, Mrs. Inchbald, and the other small fry whom Gifford trounced in the "Mæviad." O'Keeffe was a respectable playwright, but owing apparently to the impression that he was retained by Covent Garden, Sheridan employed him only once. Most of the plays of the younger Colman were produced at the Haymarket. And if Sheridan did not, as Kemble complained, take the trouble to look at the plays of the "great unacted," he was not the first or last manager against whom that failing has been alleged. But during the earlier years of his management the first Mrs. Sheridan performed the functions of dramatic reader, and that Sheridan himself was not altogether neglectful of rising talent is proved by several collections of unacted plays in the British Museum, in which the dialogue is freely corrected and condensed by Sheridan's hand.[1] Altogether it is probable that in spite of his natural indolence and dilatoriness, he really spent much time and trouble over the interests of the theatre, though, no doubt, in an irregular and spasmodic manner.

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[1] Some of Sheridan's comments are perhaps worth quoting. Thus in an opera called "The Castles of Athlyn and Dunbayne," a peasant, who had appeared in the first act, is introduced very abruptly in the last. Sheridan notes that the "Peasant must be introduced or spoke of—otherwise he will be totally forgot before his entrance." In another opera without a title there is a note: "The young soldier Albert wants a horse to go three miles in search of his mistress! Makė it longer." A play called "The Picturesque Incidents," after several alternative titles have been suggested, becomes, "The Artist, or Love in a Garret," and the names of some of the characters are altered, thus—Sir Gregory Greylove becomes Sir Lionel Latelove. A soliloquy by Sir Lionel with the

It is evident that much of the chaos, that prevailed behind the scenes during the earlier years of Sheridan's connection with Drury Lane, was due to the incapacity of his acting-managers. His old father, who was appointed to the post in 1778, was not a success, owing apparently to his fussiness. In 1782 he drifted off once more to his "Attic Entertainments," the curious medleys of recitations and lectures, with a facetious address to the ladies thrown in, to which he had recourse when regular engagements failed. Old Sherry's successor, King, was too good-natured to do well, and his *régime* is memorable only for the return of Mrs. Siddons to the London stage, on which she had appeared in Garrick's time without attracting notice. The season of 1788 opened without a stage-manager, and it was not until October of that year that Kemble undertook the post, and a period of Shakesperian revivals, well-mounted and admirably acted, began. With Kemble and Mrs. Siddons at their best, the fortunes of Drury Lane must have been exceedingly prosperous, and Sheridan seems to have managed the pair with considerable tact, though Kemble

stilted opening, "It is a thousand pities that I should not have felt sweet Love's influence sooner. Summer is gone," &c., is made by Sheridan to begin much more naturally, "Rather late in the day to be sure for both of us. Summer is gone." Again, a farce entitled "Polygamy" had been sent in without the author's name. Sheridan read it until he came to a passage where *either* of six ladies is spoken of. "Mr. O'B's for a million" is his conclusion—possibly O'Brien, author of "The Friend in Need."

complained that he would trouble himself very little about Shakespeare. The significant warning to Peake already quoted, "Keep as punctual with Kemble as you can," is not the only intimation of the sort that occurs in the correspondence. Here is another:—

> "Ten Pounds will not break our bank. Therefore by no means I beg most particularly fail to pay Kem by a draught *to-day* the order I have given him. His wife is staying at Polesden, and after *what has happen'd there* for him to be sent back without money would be the Devil." [1]

In spite of the deference paid him, Kemble seems to have been inclined to kick against managerial proceedings, especially when he was in his cups. Thus Boaden describes him as proclaiming in the irregular blank-verse which he affected when in that condition: "I am an *Eagle*, whose wings have been bound down by frosts and snows, but now I shake my pinions and cleave into the general air into which I was born." But on the appearance of Sheridan he soon laid his resentment by, and a mutual reconciliation was effected by the deity to whom they were both devoted.

In 1792 a new crisis occurred in Sheridan's fortunes. The theatre, which in the previous year had been pronounced unsafe and incapable of repair, was pulled down, and pending the rebuilding the company had to find a temporary home, at considerable expense, first at the Opera House, and then at the Haymarket

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[1] British Museum MSS. The letter was evidently written after 1795, as Polesden was settled on the second Mrs. Sheridan as a marriage portion.

Theatre. Nor was this all; though £150,000 was easily raised for the purposes of rebuilding and paying off mortgages, the completion of the new theatre was constantly delayed, and when it was finished the architect's estimate, £75,000, was found to have been vastly under the actual cost incurred. According to Moore the new theatre started with a debt of £70,000, and though Sheridan was full of expedients, in the way of entering into new partnerships and creating new shares, it never got clear. However, though the mine of his fortunes showed signs of giving out, he laboured on with unflagging spirits.

New Drury opened on the 21st of April, 1794, with "Macbeth" performed by a cast in all probability unequalled either before or since—Kemble as Macbeth; John Palmer, Macduff; Charles Kemble, a boy of eighteen, Malcolm; Charles Bannister, Hecate; Parsons, Moody, and Baddeley, the witches; and Mrs. Siddons, Lady Macbeth. On the 2nd of July was acted, in honour of Lord Howe's victory, "The Glorious First of June," a musical trifle written to order by Cobb, from a sketch supplied him by Sheridan, and conceived, rehearsed, and produced within three days. Kelly took a part, and not having time for study, requested Sheridan that it might be short. Sheridan assured him that he would comply with his wish, and gave to the innocent Irishman the sublime and solitary speech, "There stands my Louisa's cottage; she must be either in it or out of it."

Two years later Sheridan fell a dupe to William Ireland, and was induced by him to accept the forgery, "Vortigern," as an original play of Shakespeare's. His admirers may well wish that he had never been connected with so dubious a transaction. It is probable, however, that he looked at the matter purely from a manager's point of view, and thought that the play would win, at any rate, a success of curiosity. Besides, did not his old tutor, Doctor Parr, and the equally learned scholar, Dr. Warton, solemnly announce their belief in the genuineness of Ireland's documents? Why should Sheridan, who was not an enthusiastic admirer of the great dramatist, listen to Malone's denunciation of Ireland, or pay any attention to the grumblings of Kemble? Not that his conscience was altogether at rest. "This is strange," he said to Ireland, "for, though you are acquainted with my opinion of Shakespeare, he always wrote poetry." However his own suggestion that "Vortigern" was an immature production of the bard's came readily to his relief, and the play was produced on the 2nd of April. As is well known, the audience, after numerous expressions of restlessness, broke out into loud cries of dissatisfaction, which continued until Kemble, who had been trudging gloomily through his part, came to the line—

> "And when this solemn mockery is o'er."

Then they lifted up their voices, and damned the play without mercy.

This, by the way, was not the last literary imposture with which Sheridan was concerned; but again his share in the fraud was merely that of an innocent middleman. In April, 1802, a comedy entitled "Fashionable

Friends" was produced at Drury Lane, professedly as a posthumous work by Horace Walpole. It was really by Miss Berry, and its fate was that of dismal failure.

As a welcome relief to a treasury exhausted by the Vortigern catastrophe came, in 1798, the striking success of "The Stranger," a play adapted from the German of Kotzebue by Mr. Thompson, and touched up by Sheridan. His actual share in the dialogue is not very clear, though he himself claimed, curiously enough, to have written every word of it from beginning to end. However, the familiar song, "I have a silent sorrow here," was avowedly written by him, as was its music by the Duchess of Devonshire. The literary merits of the play are nil, and its popularity was due to the wonderful acting of Mrs. Siddons as Mrs. Haller. According to an anecdote, which would appear however to lack authenticity, Sheridan did not deceive himself on the point, and sought consolation in the lines—

> "The drama's laws, the drama's patrons give,
> And those who live to please must please to live."

But he was too shrewd a manager not to see that the vein of German drama might be exploited with profit, and his adaptation of Kotzebue's "Spaniards in Peru," was brought out on May 24, 1799, under the title of "Pizarro." Its production was marked by his characteristic indolence. The alterations from the plot of the German original, or rather from the English translation, by some unknown hack, upon which he relied, were slight; and Kelly tells the almost incredible story that until the end of the fourth act, Mrs. Siddons, Charles

Kemble, and Barrymore, had not received their speeches for the fifth, as Sheridan was writing them upstairs in the prompter's room.[1] Nor did he take the trouble to compose a new prologue, but reproduced that written by himself for Lady Craven's "Miniature Picture," in 1780, which had little relation to Spaniards or Peru, but contained a neat passage describing the "spark" in Hyde Park :—

> "Careless he seems, yet vigilantly sly,
> Woos the gay glance of ladies passing by,
> While his off-heel, insidiously aside,
> Provokes the caper that he seems to chide."

But he took much pains with the spectacular and musical accessories, and was feverishly anxious for the success of the piece. It was a great though wholly spurious triumph, thanks to Kemble and Mrs. Siddons, and brought in at least £15,000 into the theatre during its first season, while the published edition sold like wild-fire. The book was dedicated to his wife, "whose approbation of the drama, and whose peculiar delight in the applause it had received from the public, had been to *him* the highest gratification derived from its success."

Two celebrated men recorded their opinions of "Pizarro," and both were substantially just. Charles Fox declared that it was the worst thing possible, and Pitt said that he had heard it already—in the

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[1] Boaden, on the other hand, represents him, on the first night, as seated in a box with Richardson, and watching the performance with great anxiety. He could hardly have been in two places at once, any more than Sir Boyle Roche. Kelly's anecdote may be an improved edition of what occurred at one of the rehearsals.

Begum speech. The style indeed is closely akin to that of the oration, "something between poetry and prose," and one of Sheridan's additions to the dialogue, the simile of the vulture and the lamb, had actually done duty in Westminster Hall. It occurs in Rolla's address to the Peruvians :—

> "Yes ; they will give enlightened freedom to our minds ! who are themselves the slaves of passion, avarice, and pride. They offer us our protection ; yes, such protection as vultures give to lambs—covering and devouring them ! They call on us to barter all of good we have inherited and proved, for the desperate chance of something better which they promise. Be our plain answer this —The throne we honour is the people's choice ; the laws we reverence are our brave fathers' legacy ; the faith we follow teaches us to live in bonds of charity with all mankind, and die with hope of bliss beyond the grave. Tell your invaders this, and tell them too we seek no change ; and, least of all, such change as they would bring us."

The whole address seems to have been composed of tags from his speeches, and particularly from one on the dangers of invasion delivered in the previous year, and it had, at any rate, the merit of being *à propos.* Indeed a madman imagined that its recitation was an invaluable specific for raising recruits for the British army, and knocked up the Prime Minister in the middle of the night to communicate the discovery to him. But there its good qualities begin and end, and Sheridan's other amplifications of the original are the merest Fitzball. The best that can be said of them is that they are few in number, and that many of the false images and "nice derangement of epitaphs," which have been ascribed to the famous dramatist, are really the contributions of the unknown hack, whose attempts to write himself up to Sheridan were about on a par with Sheridan's attempts to write himself down to his understrapper. Why the author of "The Critic" ever put his name to such a production it is easier to wonder than to guess. Perhaps at the bottom of his heart he had a sneaking fondness for "his magnificence, his noise, and his procession." He must also have felt that the piece would be more certain of success if it received his endorsement, than if it appeared as the effort—say of the humble Cobb.

Meanwhile the tide of embarrassment was beating upon the theatre with a violence which not even "Pizarro" could stem. In the year of its production an action was brought against him by some of the co-proprietors who were unable to secure their dividends. Sheridan defended in person, and won an oratorical triumph in a totally untried field. But he had to submit to comments on his improvidence from the defendants' counsel, Mr. Mansfield, which wounded him to the quick; while the Lord Chancellor, in tones of fatherly admonition, applied to him the concluding words of Johnson's "Life of Savage": "Negligence and irregularity long-continued will make knowledge useless, wit ridiculous, and genius contemptible." From time to time he made half-hearted attempts to get straight. In 1801 the following announcement appeared in *The Morning Post:*—

"The Principal Proprietor of the Theatre of Drury Lane has, at length, made an arrangement by which *Justice shall keep pace with generosity*. He retains to himself an income of £2,000 a year. To his son he allots £500. The rest of his revenue is appropriated to discharge within four years the whole of his debts."

The announcement was probably made on authority, since it is corroborated by the following letter of Tom Sheridan's to Peake, but it was never carried into effect:—

> "My Father's theatrical property was of his own creating. I had no right to complain had he sold it twice over and told me to go and seek my fortune as I would (would to God I had, even my *present* standing in the army would have nearly afforded me independence), but he was not justified in day after day pointing to the Theatre as my ultimate object, and incessantly assuring me it was to be mine (as far as he could make it so), precluding me from other pursuits."

It was in vain that Sheridan called in the talents of his son to supply his own increasing deficiencies. Tom worked hard and, unlike his father, kept appointments with punctuality, while his practical and somewhat cynical knowledge of the public may be gathered from the following extract from one of his letters: "Much depends on the arrangement of the people. Remember 'St. Quentin,' and make a damnable noise and bustle whatever you do."[1] But the accession of a second Sheridan did but little to compensate the company for the loss of Kemble, who, after throwing up the stage management in 1796, and taking it up again in 1800, finally seceded altogether from Drury Lane in 1802, having failed to come to terms with Sheridan for the purchase of a quarter share in the theatre. Deprived of the great actor (who, availing himself of the fact that

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[1] Dated February 13, 1809, a few days before the theatre was destroyed by fire.

"Pizarro" had been printed, transferred the attraction to Covent Garden), the management had recourse to plays like Reynolds's "Caravan," with real water, from which a still more real dog rescued a child, and to the precocious talents of the infant phenomenon, Master Betty.[1] In those days, according to Mrs. Mathews, Sheridan was always morose, and entered the theatre as if stealthily and unwillingly. "The Circassian Bride" was announced for approaching representation when, on February 24, 1809, Sheridan was summoned from the House of Commons by the news that the theatre was on fire. He witnessed the destruction of his property with fortitude, and perhaps with merriment. Possibly he imagined that the catastrophe would break the run of ill-luck which had latterly haunted him. But, if so, he was wofully mistaken.

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[1] During the run of "The Caravan," Dignum said to Sheridan, "There is no guarding against illness, but really——"—"Really what?"—"I am so unwell that I cannot act any longer than to-night."—"You! my good fellow," was the rejoinder, "you terrified me; I thought you were going to say that the dog was taken ill." Another version of the story transfers the compliment to Reynolds.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHERIDAN'S great speech in Westminster Hall, in 1787, forms a fairly definite landmark in his political life. Up to that point in his career he had acted, on the whole, as a consistent member of the Whig party, animated perhaps by no very deep convictions, but still zealously faithful to his friends and admirably disinterested in his conduct. Sheridan remained incorruptible to the last. But already he had formed that connection with the Prince of Wales which induced him to separate his interests from those of his associates, and eventually led to his isolation and extinction. The fate that overtook him was just—

> "The heart whose hopes could make it
> Trust one so false, so low,
> Deserved that thou should'st break it."

But it is evident that his aims were not altogether ignoble, though his action in their pursuit was occasionally the reverse of satisfactory. Naturally a man of vast confidence in his own powers, he hoped to make himself indispensable to the Prince, partly through the charms of his conversation and the attractiveness of his conviviality, but chiefly through the wisdom of his advice in political emergencies. Then when the King died or became incapable of conducting the affairs of the nation, he would naturally step into the place of the chief confidential adviser of the head of the State. A great ambition truly for a political adventurer to entertain, but unfortunately founded on several miscalculations. In the first place, George III. defied probability by continuing to hold the reins of power until long after his son had ceased to identify his fortunes with the Whig friends of his youth. Secondly, the Prince was quite clever enough to make use of Sheridan without being governed by him. As a rule George had recourse to his advice in the first instance, but Burke or Sir Gilbert Elliot were frequently called in when a political or semi-political apology had to be penned, while on the floor of the House of Commons Fox and Grey, who had influence as well as abilities, were commissioned to act as his champions rather than Sheridan. In fact, after the manner of princes, he played off one adherent against the other, committing to Sheridan, who had most at stake, the execution of the most thankless tasks. Sheridan never became more than a subordinate, a minor actor on the ignoble stage of Carlton House politics. Seldom has a prince been more faithfully served, and seldom has a servant been treated with greater ingratitude.

Though Sheridan had acted for several years in a private capacity as the lay keeper of the Prince's apology for a conscience, the first occasion on which he came prominently forward as his confidential friend was in 1787. The circumstances, so far as Sheridan was concerned, were briefly these: In April of that year the Prince's debts were, not for the first time, brought before the notice of Parliament, and Mr. Rolle incidentally raised the question of the Prince's alleged marriage with Mrs. Fitzherbert. A lie came naturally to George, and he promptly authorized Fox to contradict Rolle's statement, a request with which Fox, unsuspecting in disposition and not too nice in morals, promptly complied. A revulsion of feeling naturally ensued, and the House voted the increase of allowance, but then the Prince had to reckon with Mrs. Fitzherbert, who was naturally much distressed. He had recourse in the first instance to Mr. Grey, but that high-minded statesman would give him no help. "Well, then, Sheridan must say something," was the Prince's significant determination, and to Sheridan accordingly fell the unworthy lot of paying a few vapid compliments to Mrs. Fitzherbert, in which the whole question was begged, and the royal lie indirectly confirmed. After Sheridan was dead, George added the finishing touch to his baseness by authorizing Croker to deny that the speech had been made on his authority; it was, he declared, actuated solely by the tears of Mrs. Fitzherbert.

Unwarned by experience, Sheridan, on the illness of the King in the following year, plunged again into the mazes of princely intrigue. In the absence of Fox in Italy, he directed the scramble for power, and, with a keen eye for want of character, opened a secret negotiation with Thurlow, the Lord Chancellor. On his return from abroad, the step was condemned by Fox, who had a deserved contempt for Thurlow, and had more than half promised the Chancellorship to Lord Loughborough in the event of a change of government; still for the moment it promised well. For himself Sheridan was content to bide his time, and accepted the inferior post of Treasurer of the Navy *in posse.* In fact, with the arrival of Fox, the conduct of affairs passed from Sheridan's hands, but it cannot be said that what influence he possessed was exercised, during the debates on the Regency Bill, on the side of discretion. On the contrary, when Fox committed himself to the assertion of the Prince's unalienable right to assume the government, Sheridan, though the damaging effect of the theory upon the fortunes of the Opposition was immediately perceived, set himself to pour oil on the flames. A few days later, while asserting the right of the Prince of Wales to an unrestricted regency, he reminded the House of "the danger of provoking that Prince to assert his right." "It was such a blunder," wrote Grenville to his brother, "that I never knew any man of the meanest talents guilty of before. During the whole time that I have sat in Parliament I have never seen such an uproar as was raised by his threatening." Pitt immediately availed himself of such rash tactics. Sheridan's language was characterized as "an indecent menace thrown out to awe and influence the proceedings of the House." "To assert the inherent right of the Prince of Wales to assume the government," he declared later on, "is virtually to revive those exploded ideas of the divine and indefeasible right of princes which have so justly sunk into contempt and almost oblivion." The Prime Minister was winning all along the line, when the recovery of the King, under the care of Dr. Willis, consummated his triumph.

The rout of the Opposition left many bitter memories behind it, particularly in the minds of the two men who had been most confident of victory — Sheridan and Burke. It is true that their quarrel was almost inevitable. Fortune had marked them out as rivals, and the rivalry was deepened by the vastness of their ambitions, the jealousy of their characters, and the insecurity of their positions. But it is from this period that the antagonism became markedly exhibited, and the Prince of Wales was its conscious or unconscious fomenter. To Burke he allotted the composition of a vindication of his conduct in the shape of a letter to Mr. Pitt, to Sheridan the task of criticising it, and Burke never forgave the interference. These latent differences among the members of Fox's staff became of vital importance on the outbreak of the French Revolution. It was clear from the outset which side Burke would take. His love of liberty was tempered with a due respect for authority, and he deplored alike the rapid advances of the French towards democracy, and the tumultuous means by which those advances were effected. Fox, on the contrary, espoused the cause of the revolution with a genuine, if unreasoning, enthusiasm, and it was clear that, with its leaders thus divided, the dissolution of the Whig party was imminent. The first passage of arms between Burke and Fox, however, which occurred in 1790, during a debate on the army estimates, would have passed off without result had not Sheridan intervened with a speech which, uncompromising though it was, no doubt was unnecessarily treated by Burke as a declaration of war between the last speaker and himself. "Henceforth," he declared, "his honourable friend and he were separated in politics," and though efforts were made to reconcile the two, the rupture was never healed. As a natural sequel came, in the following session, the familiar and dramatic separation between Burke and Fox, and in 1793 the secession of a considerable portion of the Whig party, including three-fourths of its aristocratic chiefs, to the ministerial benches.

Sheridan was of course not entirely responsible for the turn affairs had taken. Still he had given the first blow to the wedge that had split old political friendships asunder, and he now set himself by his sarcasms to foil all attempts at reconciliation. At the expense of Burke he committed himself, in the course of 1793, to the unworthy sneer, "It is hard that he whom we have drummed out of the regiment as a deserter should be lurking within our lines as a spy." The accusation was unjust, though Burke's theatrical exclamation, "I quit the camp!" certainly provoked a retort. Nor was there any real justice, though there was some plausibility, in his famous condemnation of the seceding Whigs who had accepted office and honours from Pitt, "Let them go and hide their heads in their coronets." In short, his mind during this period seems to have been wholly out of gear, partly perhaps from private and domestic reasons, but partly also from consternation at the completeness of his own handiwork of ruin. Neither in his criticisms on the progress of the Revolution, nor in his comments upon the war which was now forced upon

England, is there much wisdom or patriotism to be found. It is unnecessary, therefore, to dwell upon them at any length. But if Sheridan was infected by faction he was at least superior to treachery. It is more than probable that both then and afterwards he could have made his peace with the Government, but in spite of his pecuniary difficulties he remained faithful to his principles. All credit to him for his incorruptibility.

> "Sir," he once said in the hearing of Byron, "it is easy for my Lord G——, or Marquis B——, or Lord H——, with thousands upon thousands a year, some of it either *presently* derived or *inherited* in sinecure or acquisitions from the public money, to boast of their patriotism and keep aloof from temptation; but they do not know from what temptation those have kept aloof, who had equal pride, at least equal talents, and not unequal passions, and, nevertheless, knew not in the course of their lives what it was to have a shilling of their own."

Sheridan appears to have been rather drunk when he made the observation, but he never spoke a truer word. Whatever his private conduct may have been, his political record will bear the minutest scrutiny.

The mutiny at the Nore in 1797 gave Sheridan an opportunity of setting himself right with the majority of his fellow-countrymen. On that occasion he acted a truly worthy part, and by his strenuous advocacy of prompt measures for its suppression, undoubtedly checked something like a national panic. We know also from Lord Holland's "Memoirs of the Whig Party," that he opposed the ill-judged secession of the Opposition from Parliament which had taken place a few weeks previously, and though he shared in the movement for awhile, soon returned to the House of Commons, and resumed a fairly active part in debate. In the absence of his leader he appears to have considered that he was entitled to take up a line of his own, and his conciliatory attitude towards the ministry was vehemently resented at St. Ann's Hill. Thus in 1797 Fox commented on the "incurable itch which Sheridan seemed to have of distinguishing his conduct from that of those with whom he wishes to be supposed united;" and in 1802 he wrote to Grey, "whether Sheridan will be with us I do not *know*, and I suspect you do not *care*, or even that your wishes would be that he should not." Stories were current that he had separated from Fox; some went even so far as to assert that his services had been solicited by the Crown, but to both statements he gave the most complete and vehement denial.

The simple fact seems to be—even if due allowance is made for Sheridan's love of popularity, which was considerable—that having learnt wisdom by experience, he repented the tone adopted by himself and other extreme Whigs at the outbreak of the revolutionary war. At last he began to see that unless something like a national effort was made, the decline and fall of the British Empire was imminent.

> "If," said he, in the year 1800, "we are threatened to be deprived of that which is the charter of our existence, which has procured for us the commerce of the world, and been the means of spreading our glory over every land—if the rights and honours of our flag are to be called in question, every risk should be run and every danger braved. Then we should have a legitimate cause of

> war—then the heart of every Briton would burn with indignation, and his hand be stretched forth in defence of his country. If our flag is to be insulted, let us nail it to the top-mast of the nation; there let it fly while we shed the last drop of our blood in protecting it, and let it be degraded only when the nation itself is overwhelmed."

Such being the general aspect of affairs, the formation of the Addington Ministry in 1801 seemed to Sheridan to give an opening for a fusion of parties. It was obvious that the administration only existed on the sufferance of Pitt, and that to prevent Pitt from returning to office the Whig Opposition must either support the Government, or form a coalition with the "new Opposition," headed by Lord Grenville. As the Grenvilles formed an ultra war-party, the former step was the more logical of the two, and Sheridan accordingly adopted an ironically favourable tone towards "the Doctor" in public. Thus in a debate on the army estimates, after characterizing the dislike entertained by the Opposition towards the Minister as unreasonable, and quoting against them, amidst shouts of laughter, the familiar lines—

> "I do not like thee, *Doctor* Fell,
> The reason why I cannot tell," &c.,

he proceeded to urge that the foreign policy of the Government had been all that could be desired. Addington, he said, had been a great success as Speaker;

> "but did the House expect that when he was minister he was to stand up and call Europe to order? Was he to send Mr. Coleman,

the Sergeant-at-Arms, to the Baltic, and summon the Northern Powers to the Bar of the House? Was he to see the Powers of Germany scrambling like members over the Benches, and say—Gentlemen must take their places? Was he to cast his eye on the Tuscan Gallery and exclaim that strangers must withdraw? Was he to stand across the Rhine, and say, The Germans to the right and the French to the left? If he could have done these things, he (Sheridan), for one, should always vote that the Speaker of the House should be appointed the Minister of the country. But the Right Honourable Gentleman had done all that a reasonable man could expect him to do."

Meanwhile he took care to assure Addington, in private, that his support was entirely disinterested. "My visits to you," he said, "may possibly be misconstrued by my friends, but I hope you know, Mr. Addington, that I have an unpurchaseable mind." And to prove that this was not mere talk he declined for his son the appointment of Registrar of the Vice-Admiralty Court at Malta, and possibly refused office for himself.

Sheridan, however, soon saw that if he went over to Addington he must go over alone, unaccompanied even by the small band of the friends of the Prince of Wales. For the Prince, influenced by the refusal of the Government to accept the offer of his military services, declined to give them any active support; and Fox, who looked upon Addington as a "vile fellow," had, in spite of loud murmurs from his followers, determined on joining the Grenvilles. For the moment Sheridan was absolutely isolated. Windham taunted him with behaving like a new recruit; no sooner had he fallen into the Government ranks than he fired off his musket, without waiting for the word of command.

Cobbett addressed to him ten scathing letters, in which the apostasy of the "Political Proteus" was denounced in uncompromising terms. Accordingly he had to make his peace with his party. "He is," wrote Fox to Grey, on April 6, 1804, "very desirous of getting right again, but you will easily believe my dependence on him is not very firm." To prove his sincerity he turned and rent Addington, upon whose appearance in Windsor uniform to announce the declaration of war with France he passed the happy comment, "The Right Honourable Gentleman has assumed his favourite character of the sheep in wolf's clothing." And he was one of the most assiduous of the assailants of the dying Pitt. There, however, he met his match, and in their last encounter the Treasury Bench scored an easy victory. The Prime Minister satirized Sheridan's eloquence as "an explosion of froth and air, of all his hoarded repartees, all his matured jests, the full contents of his commonplace book;" and Gillray drove the application home by his famous cartoon, "Uncorking old Sherry."

In spite of his rejuvenated Whiggery, Sheridan was condemned for the remainder of his life to wander without the fold. Though it is not true, as has been asserted, that he was excluded during the last illness of Mr. Fox, he never regained the confidence of that usually placable heart. By Grey he had long been disliked, while the cold and haughty Grenville resented his efforts to prevent the coalition. On the formation of the Ministry of all the Talents, Sheridan was excluded from the Cabinet, and compelled to put up with the office of Treasurer of the Navy, for which he was notoriously unfit. The reason assigned for the slight was that his convivial habits rendered him an unsafe possessor of Cabinet secrets, which, said Sheridan, might have been a valid objection if there were any secrets to be disclosed. After the death of Fox, Sheridan wished to succeed him as the representative of Westminster—indeed he had long coveted the honour, and is even said by Lord Holland to have advised Fox's retirement from public life in the year 1800, with the insidious design of stepping into his shoes as the representative of that popular constituency. On this occasion, however, Lord Grenville interposed, and Sheridan was compelled to withdraw his candidature in favour of that of Lord Percy, though he was returned at the general election about three weeks later. He revenged himself by declining to attend Lord Grenville's meetings, and by ridiculing his downfall in 1807, owing to the injudicious revival of the Catholic question. "I have often," he said, "heard of people knocking their brains against a wall, but I never before knew of any one building a wall expressly for the purpose."

From this time forward, Sheridan, though still affecting to keep up the Whig connection, adopted Carlton House politics, pure and simple. After the death of Fox, the Prince of Wales declined to pose any longer as a party man, while his factotum disliked alike Grenville, Grey, and Whitbread, who had become a leader of the Opposition. Sheridan was a good hater, and when, in 1810, the Prince, now become Regent, showed a disposition to summon the Whig chiefs to form a Government, he had no hesitation in tripping up their heels.

The reply which Grenville and Grey, at the request of the Regent, had drawn up in answer to the addresses of the two Houses, was subjected by Sheridan to a searching criticism, which even Moore, partizan as he was, is constrained to confess that it thoroughly deserved; and a totally different form of answer, drawn up by the Prince and himself, was adopted. The remonstrance of Grenville only evoked from Sheridan ridicule and satirical rhymes, and the Tories in consequence remained in power. In the following year when the negotiations were renewed, Sheridan suppressed in his communication to Lord Grenville all intimation that the Household were ready to resign, and over this supposed obstacle the attempt to form a government broke down. His conduct was not too scrupulous, but he was a broken and disappointed man with a long series of slights to avenge.

This was Sheridan's last action of importance in the theatre of politics. In the month of September following he stood once more for Stafford, but his Westminster candidature, added to his known impecuniosity, had alienated the electors, and he was defeated. And so his long political career closed in failure. Throughout it had been entirely characteristic of him. His name is unconnected with a single legislative measure. No real conviction is to be traced in his casual advocacy of the causes of reform and abolition; his praises of the French Revolution are inspired quite as much by faction and party spirit as by any real zeal for liberty. Though proud of being an Irishman, he showed little appreciation of the wants of Ireland; and his criticism of Pitt's free-trade proposals, and of the act of union with England, was equally unsound. During his later years the friendship of the Prince of Wales hung like a loadstone about his neck, and in combination with his inordinate vanity induced him to attempt the *rôle* of a moderator between parties, with the result that he was alienated from his friends, and gained in return only the empty compliments of his enemies. Yet it may fearlessly be asserted of him that he was a patriot at heart, and his support of Pitt and Addington, even if its motives were partly personal, was a more worthy course of action than Fox's petulant retirement to St. Ann's Hill. Above all, he was entirely incorrupt. In spite of his necessities no offers of place or pension could tempt him to go over to the enemy, and with the exception of three brief intervals of office he began, continued, and ended in Opposition. He may have been an adventurer, and he was doubtless an insubordinate follower. But though he fought for his own hand as the *enfant perdu* of politics, he was not a mere condottiere whose sword was at the service of the highest bidder. Besides to a man of wit, party shibboleths are apt in the end to become rather ridiculous, and genius may fairly revolt against the edicts of grandees of the stamp of Portland or Grenville, to which it is the duty of mediocrity to submit. After detraction has said its worst about Sheridan, his remains a great name in the annals of the House of Commons.

CHAPTER IX.

SEVERAL years before he ceased to be a member of Parliament, Sheridan had become a hopelessly ruined man. The destruction of Drury Lane Theatre in 1809 had deprived him of his only permanent source of income, with the exception of his salary as Receiver of the Duchy of Cornwall—an appointment to which he was presented by the Prince of Wales in 1804—and that was in all probability anticipated. It is true that he still retained a considerable portion of the property, but the committee which was formed for the rebuilding of the theatre, with Whitbread as its guiding spirit, declined to allow him any connection with the new undertaking. They were willing to buy him out for £28,000, but out of that sum the Linleys and others were to be paid, and the satisfaction of their claims could not have left a large balance at the bankers. Further, Sheridan himself, evidently wishing to get the blind side of the committee, proposed the concession that his claims should not be satisfied until after the theatre was built. His mortification when he was held to his word was extreme, and his correspondence with Whitbread is a painful exhibition of the contest between wounded pride and pressing necessity.

The explanation of the mystery of Sheridan's existence during the last years of his life is that the sum total of his debts was nothing like so large as was generally imagined. When his pecuniary affairs were examined in 1808 it was found that his *bonâ-fide* obligations were only about ten thousand pounds. Indeed, had it not been for the false pride which forbade him to contest any of his creditor's claims, however extravagant, his friends might possibly have extricated him from his difficulties, though those difficulties would always have been liable to recur. He preferred rather to pay his duns in proportion to the importunity and extravagance of their demands. How he contrived to rub along may be gathered partly from the draft of an agreement among the Sheridan MSS. in the British Museum, by which he made over the copyright of his dramatic works to James Grant Raymond for £600,[1] and partly from Mr. Clayden's "Life of Samuel Rogers," where it appears that the poet-banker helped him to raise money on Mrs. Sheridan's farms about Leatherhead. It would be remembered too that Sheridan's powers of fascination were undoubtedly great, even at this period of his life, and he relied upon them as a weapon of defence. Kindhearted tradesmen were easily persuaded to postpone presenting their accounts; and he was even competent in an emergency, as Byron records with wondering admiration, to soften the heart of an attorney. "Would you have us proceed against Old Sherry?" asked the legal adviser of Sheridan's wine merchant—whose bill, one would think, must have been a heavy one.—"Besides what would be the use of it." And Byron records that the attorney was so completely talked over by Sheridan, that had his client come in, honest man though he was, with all the law and some justice on his side, he would promptly have been thrown out of the window.

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[1] The arrangement appears to have fallen through, but he must have been in great straits to think of parting with the copyright for so small a sum.

Mr. Whitbread seems, indeed, to have been almost the only person, with whom Sheridan had business dealings, whose determination he did not at one time or another disarm. That cool-headed man however was inexorable, and it was to his refusal to advance £2,000 out of the sum due to Sheridan by the Drury Lane Committee for his share in the property, that he attributed his failure at Stafford. That defeat was closely followed by a breach between Sheridan and the patron for whom he had sacrificed his political career. Nor can it be denied that the Regent's version of the story, as given to the world for the first time in the Croker Papers, is greatly to Sheridan's discredit. It appears that though he refused, as stated by Moore, to re-enter Parliament as a direct nominee of the Regent, he did not scruple to borrow £3,000 pounds from him, to purchase a seat at Wootton Bassett, on his own account.[1] The distinction drawn shows a curious obliquity of moral vision, but it may even be doubted whether Sheridan ever had any real intention of devoting the money to the purpose for which it was ostensibly procured. He made no attempt to visit the borough, the money was lodged in the hands of a solicitor by Sheridan without the slightest intimation that it had been advanced to him with any restrictions, and it was promptly devoted to the payment of certain pressing debts, among them one to the solicitor. The fraud was of course discovered, and Sheridan's explanation, by which the solicitor was made to blame, must be pronounced ingenious rather than convincing. "I never," continued the Regent, in tones of edifying if over-elaborated morality, "saw Sheridan (to speak to) after; not that it was much worse in principle than other things of his, nor that I had given orders to exclude him, but it was felt by Sheridan himself to be so gross a violation of confidence—such a want of respect, and such a series of lies and fraud, that he did not venture to approach me, and, in fact, he never came near me again." And yet a really royal heart would have overlooked the injury, in consideration of Sheridan's lifelong devotion.

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[1] The Regent was not the most trustworthy of men, but in this instance he seems to have been speaking the truth. His version of the story, as given in the Croker Papers, is corroborated by information given by Lord Holland to Moore on the authority of Sheridan himself.

His exile from Carlton House must have been felt bitterly by the old courtier. Yet he fought bravely against his troubles, and in the society of Moore, Rogers, and Byron, his wit still sparkled, even though as Byron recorded, "It was always saturnine and sometimes savage; he never laughed—at least that *I* saw, and I watched him." "I have seen him," Byron states in another place, "cut up Whitbread, quiz Madame de Staël, annihilate Colman, and do little less by some others (whose names, as friends, I set not down) of good fame on their side."[1] The cutting up of Whitbread must have been a most congenial occupation to Sheridan, and of his recorded sayings few are neater than his comment on the brewer-politician's allusion to the Phœnix in his address for the opening of Drury Lane. "But Whitbread made more of this bird than any of them—he entered into particulars, and described its wings, beak, tail, &c.; in short, it was a *Poulterer's* description of a Phœnix." What other sarcasms Sheridan may have uttered at the expense of the new theatre we do not know. But this we do know, that when, three years after it was built, he was induced by Lord Essex to see Kean, he promptly made his way to the green-room, where a bumper to his health was drunk by the assembled actors. And so the father of the stage bade farewell to the old region of his glory.[2]

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[1] Mrs. Mathews, on the other hand, declares that "Mr. Colman fairly broke him down with the force of his vivacity." However, Byron could appreciate Sheridan, while Mrs. Mathews evidently writes about him with prejudice.

[2] Readers of Moore will remember how Whitbread offered Mrs. Sheridan a box at the new theatre, and how she annoyed that precise person by not sending him an answer. It appears from the MSS. at the British Museum that she did at last reply, though not until more than three months after Whitbread's first letter, and probably without Sheridan's knowledge.

"My dear Mr. Whitbread,—I beg you will return my best thanks to the Committee for the attention they have shewn me respecting a Box at Drury Lane Theatre. I know nothing of the same kind that could have been equally valuable to me, and I accept the offer in the terms in which it is made.

"With much gratitude, I am,
"My dear Mr. Whitbread,
"Affectionately yours,
"Sept. 14, 1812. E. T. Sheridan."

On the whole, however, Sheridan's decadence must have been a most melancholy spectacle, even though in his cups he was still capable of so supreme a witticism as his solemn assurance to the watchman, who came upon him "fuddled, bewildered, almost insensible," that his name was Wilberforce. Byron was right when he urged—

"But should there be to whom the fatal blight,
Of failing wisdom yields a base delight,
Men who exult when minds of heavenly tone,
Jar in the music which was born their own.
Still let them pause—Ah ! little do they know
That what to them seemed Vice might be but Woe.
Hard is his fate on whom the public gaze
Is fix'd for ever to detract or praise ;
Repose denies her requiem to his name,
And Folly loves the martyrdom of fame."

That martyrdom was destined to be terribly acute. The sum arising from the sale of his theatrical property in 1813–14 was soon exhausted by the various claims upon it, and, his immunity from arrest having ceased with his disappearance from the House of Commons, he made the acquaintance of the interior of the sponging-house, "to the profanation," as he characteristically termed it, "of his person." All his most cherished possessions were disposed of one after the other, including the famous portrait of his first wife, as St. Cecilia, by the hand of Sir Joshua. Here is a statement which he seems to have drawn up about this time for his friend Peter Moore, and it shows the way that his money went :—

	£	s.	d.
Paid Bill	50	0	0
Interest, 2½ years	6	5	0
Attorney's Bill...	9	4	6
Expenses of arrest	2	6	0
	£67	15	6[1]

And yet, low as he had fallen, he retained much elevation of feeling. If society shut its gates against him, he never whined outside, and Moore records that he rarely borrowed money from the obscure friends who stood by him to the last. It is only as we read the concluding chapters of Moore's biography that we realize the full force of Richardson's estimate of his friend's character.

When his last illness came upon him Sheridan was practically deserted by all, except that small band of men who are remembered solely for their charity to the dying genius, Peter Moore, Ironmonger, and "Hat" Vaughan. Tom Sheridan was abroad, and already a victim to that hereditary consumption under which he sank not many years after his father's death. Mrs. Sheridan had borne with her husband's failings patiently, as he would have been the first to acknowledge, but she too was afflicted by a fatal disease. The Regent declared, on the authority of Vaughan, that during Sheridan's last days upon earth she was too ill to leave her own bed. But Smyth certainly saw her when he came to inquire after his old patron, and it may be that the gruesome description of their common misery given in the Croker Papers owes a good deal to the Regent's imagination, which was notoriously exuberant. It certainly is not a pleasant picture.

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[1] British Museum MSS.

> "They had hardly a servant left. Mrs. Sheridan's maid she was about to send away, but they could not collect a guinea or two to pay the woman her wages. When Vaughan entered the house he found all the reception rooms bare, and the whole house in a state of filth and stench that was quite intolerable. Sheridan himself he found in a truckle bed in a garret, with a coarse blue and red coverlid, such as one sees used as horse-cloths, over him; out of this bed he had not moved for a week, . . . and in this state the unhappy man had been allowed to wallow, nor could Vaughan discover that any one had taken any notice of him, except one old female friend—whose name I hardly know whether I am authorised to mention—Lady Bessborough, who sent £20."

Even as Sheridan lay dying, and possibly starving, his creditors pressed upon him; and had it not been for the prompt assistance of Rogers, and the stout interposition of his doctor, he would have been carried off to die in the sponging-house. When it was too late some efforts were made to assist him in his necessity. Indeed, it is only just to point out that until an eloquent appeal for succour was inserted in *The Morning Post* many of his old friends may well have been in ignorance of his actual condition. But it was all the same to Sheridan whether they were heartless or simply thoughtless, and the Regent was justified in characterizing the ice and currant water that was sent from Holland House as "an odd contribution." From the Regent himself came £200, which Mrs. Sheridan, so soon as the danger of actual want had passed away, returned. The smallness of the sum is naturally visited by Moore, on the evidence before him, with just condemnation. But it seems that the Regent, who naturally remembered his last money transaction with Sheridan, was really in ignorance of the position in which his old servant was placed; that he set no limit to the sum to be advanced; and that Mr. Vaughan, who was himself in ignorance that Sheridan was destitute of the necessities of life, only consented with reluctance to accept the £200. Besides, the gift was made anonymously. In fact, taking into consideration the circumstances as a whole, the candid critic will probably pronounce that so far from being to the Regent's discredit, the gift constitutes one of the few really worthy actions with which his name is connected in the page of history.

The anguish of his last hours thus in a measure relieved, Sheridan met death bravely and wittily. "My friends," he said, "have been very kind in calling upon me, and in offering their services in their respective ways; Dick W—— has just been here with his *will-making* face." To his old friend Lady Bessborough he sent a last message that his eyes would look up to the coffin-lid as brightly as ever. He passed beyond the clutch of the sheriff's officer on July 7, 1816, and a few days later came a magnificent funeral in Westminster Abbey to heighten the contrasts in his tragic close.

"How proud they can press to the funeral array,
  Of him whom they shunn'd in his sickness and sorrow!
How bailiffs may seize his last blanket to-day,
  Whose pall shall be held up by nobles to-morrow!

Was this then the fate of this high-giſted man,
  The pride of the palace, the bower, and the hall—
The orator, dramatist, minstrel—who ran
  Through each mood of the lyre, and was master of all?"

THE END.

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